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THE SCENE DESIGN FOR *KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN*

by

NOAH J. FILES

A THESIS SUBMITTED

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

IN

THEATRE ARTS

MINNESTOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, MANKATO

MANKATO, MINNESOTA

MAY 2014

Date _____

This thesis has been examined and approved.

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ABSTRACT

Files, Noah J. *The Scene Design for Kiss of the Spider Woman*. M.F.A. Thesis. Minnesota State University, Mankato, 2014.

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the Masters of Fine Arts degree in Theatre Arts: Scene Design at Minnesota State University, Mankato. This thesis contains a detailed account of Noah J. Files's scene design research and process for *Kiss of the Spider Woman* by Terrence McNally, John Kander and Fred Ebb. The musical was produced in the Andreas Theatre, opening January 30 and closing February 8, 2014.

The first chapter is a preliminary analysis of the plot, the designer's first intentions and reactions to the scenic requirements, and the designer's goals for the production. The second chapter is an historical and critical analysis providing perspective into the history of the musical and research to illuminate the designer's choices. The third chapter is a journal of the designer's experiences throughout the process. The fourth chapter is a post-production analysis reflecting upon the outcome of the production. Finally, the fifth chapter is an analysis of the designer's growth and process throughout his time at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Appendices and works cited are also included, which contain research images and early sketches, technical drawings, design draft work, and production photos.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would sincerely like to thank everyone who has helped me achieve a Master of Fine Arts degree from Minnesota State University, Mankato. The faculty and staff in the Department of Theatre and Dance have been immeasurably valuable to my education and approach to the design process. I would specifically like to thank my advisor John Paul for challenging and encouraging me throughout my time in graduate school.

In addition, I would like to thank the theatre faculty from Minot State University, in particular my advisor Kevin R. Neuharth. His passion for theatre helped me realize my own professional and educational goals for my life in the theatre. He and the other current and former faculty for whom I worked have been incredibly encouraging throughout my graduate education.

I would also like to thank the other graduate students with whom I have been able to share time at Minnesota State Mankato. Not only have they provided me with the encouragement and friendship I needed to make it through graduate school, but they have also given me fantastic memories that I will carry with me throughout my life.

Finally, I would like to thank my father, who got me started in the theatre; my mother for her unwavering encouragement; my siblings Adam and Ariel for their ability to ground me when I felt lost; and I would especially like to thank my wife Kristin. She has supported me unconditionally through many stressful, frustrating and difficult circumstances, and I could not have done any of this without her support.

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CHAPTER I

PRE-PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

Kiss of the Spider Woman is a musical drama with music by John Kander and Fred Ebb. The book was written by Terence McNally. It is based on the Manuel Puig novel of the same title. The musical had its first run in London's West End (1992) and soon after on Broadway (1993) and won the 1993 Tony Award for Best Musical. This production will be performed at Minnesota State University, Mankato in the Andreas Theatre. It will have ten performances, opening January 30 and closing February 9, 2014. It will be directed by Paul J. Hustoles, with music direction by Nick Wayne. Costume design will be done by Alisa Bowman, lighting design by Steve Smith, sound design by Anna Warda Alex and technical direction by PJ Crowley. The scene design for the production will be done by the author of this thesis, third-year Master of Fine Arts (MFA) candidate Noah J. Files. *Kiss of the Spider Woman* will serve as the thesis project toward the completion of his MFA in Theatre Arts with an emphasis in Scene Design. John Paul will serve as Files's advisor on the project.

Kiss of the Spider Woman takes place in a non-descript prison somewhere in Latin America, "sometime in the recent past" (McNally 8). This vagueness gives the director and design team for each production of *Kiss of the*

Spider Woman a lot of possibilities as far as when and even where, specifically, to set their production. The story of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* follows the relationship between Molina, an openly homosexual department store window dresser, and political terrorist and revolutionary, Valentin. Molina is imprisoned for corrupting a minor; he engaged in a sexual relationship with a 17 year old. Valentin has been imprisoned for passing travel documents to revolutionary political fugitives. Throughout their time as cellmates, Valentin and Molina go from being relative strangers to friends, confidantes and lovers. Their sanity is kept intact largely through Molina's storytelling. Molina regales Valentin with stories from his favorite films he saw as a child. His favorite actress was a woman he refers to simply as "Aurora" (26). Molina is enchanted by all of her performances but he is frightened by one of her roles: the spider woman, who is the physical manifestation of death. The storytelling notwithstanding, Molina is discretely trying to collect information about Valentin's outside political activities in order to make a deal with the Warden to receive a reduced sentence and see his (allegedly) very sick mother. Overall, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* is a story about sexuality, love, trust and escapism.

The first, and arguably most important theme is sexuality and gender identity. It is clear that this theme is incredibly important for several reasons. It is a theme that is constantly at the forefront of the story and presents itself in many different ways throughout the work. It is also important because in a story that

becomes so intimate (personally and sexually), the characters' self-prescribed gender roles and their evolution over the time they spend together, become a much stronger focus in the story than either character's life outside of the prison cell. At the start of the show, these gender roles are firmly placed on opposite ends of the sexual spectrum. On one end is Valentin, the embodiment of masculinity. On the other end is femininity, which manifests itself through Molina and his muse Aurora. While this dichotomy is present in the beginning of the story, as the relationship between Molina and Valentin evolves, these notions of masculinity, femininity and sexuality begin to fall into a nebulous grey area.

At the beginning of the show, Valentin becomes the symbol for all that is stereotypically masculine: he is reserved, when he does speak he is terse and gruff, and he takes himself very seriously. Valentin also harbors a lot of anger at his predicament, and in true "manly" fashion, he expresses that anger at whoever is within earshot. In this small prison cell, that means Molina. In the third scene of the show, Valentin refers to Molina as a "ridiculous faggot window dresser" (20). This hostility and the ad hominem attack of Molina establish the starting point for Valentin and his evolution throughout the story.

As Valentin represents the masculinity in the show, Molina is the aperture through which the audience sees femininity. This is most obvious through Molina referring to himself as a girl or woman throughout the show. The guards also refer to Molina with the female pronouns "she" and "her" (21). As Valentin

exhibits many stereotypes of masculinity, Molina is the acme of effeminate homosexual stereotypes. He is a window dresser at a clothing store, and he identifies himself as female frequently, even in the way he eats (40). Also, his speech and turn of phrase have a familiar, feminine quality. For instance, Molina using the word “adored” instead of “liked” (26), and referring to men to whom he is speaking as “darling” (21).

The other themes in the show manifest in very literal ways. Love and trust become intertwined throughout the story. As Valentin begins to trust Molina, their relationship evolves from that of strangers with an intense dislike of one another into a friendship. By the end of the show, it becomes an honest and deeply felt love between the two men.

Escapism is also an enormous part of the story. Both Molina and Valentin are trying to escape (at least mentally) from their current circumstances. Molina’s tactics to accomplish this mental reprieve include cooking for he and Valentin (once he is given supplies to do so), imagining his life on the outside once he is free, imagining his mother and how they will be reunited, and dreaming of his return to the clothing shop and his job as a window dresser. The most powerful tool for Molina’s escapism is one that deeply affects Valentin as well, and that is the recounting of cinematic stories that he has committed to memory. While each film may be drastically different from one to the next, the one thing that ties them together is the star of the films, the previously mentioned Aurora.

Kiss of the Spider Woman will be a very interesting endeavor for every member of the design and production team. The show moves from reality to fantasy frequently and quickly; there will be no room for unclear communication. The utmost collaborative efforts of every design team member will be needed to ensure that the technical elements fit together to form a consistent production. *Kiss of the Spider Woman* has the potential to be a very spectacular show with all of the fantasy and illusion involved. The designer feels that the greatest difficulty in moving forward on this musical is solving the problem of how to produce these fantastic dreamlike sequences in the midst of this macabre story of suffering, isolation and despair.

Most of the actual story of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* takes place within the walls of the prison; the fantasy elements (Molina's films) will likely be the most difficult elements to convey scenically. The first scene of the show has several different locations that need to be considered. The main cell where Molina and Valentin reside is the first location in the show, and features as the primary location for most of the show's action. The first scene is also the audience's first exposure to Aurora, featuring her in a bathtub and surrounded by male servants. While the context of the scene is not explicitly mentioned, wealth and elegance are definitely going to be called for. This scene also introduces the Warden and a couple of guards, and the script calls for a catwalk that goes along the cellblock that includes the cell of Valentin and Molina.

The second scene implies the whole cellblock being onstage, as there are eight prisoners (plus Molina and Valentin) scripted in the scene. There is also a brief part of the scene in which Aurora appears as the Spider Woman. The third scene takes place in Molina and Valentin's cell, but there are moments at the end, with Marta (Valentin's love in the outside world) and Molina's mother singing about their respective loves. The fourth scene starts in the cellblock and transitions into an exchange with the Warden. As the Warden talks, the script describes a prisoner climbing a fence or wall, as if to escape. The prisoner is shot dead, and there is a brief appearance by the Spider Woman. Neither scenes five nor six present new locations. They both take place in the main cell. Scene seven takes place in what is either an interrogation room or the Warden's office, the script is unclear in its description. The Spider Woman oversees the goings-on of this scene, including the warden informing Molina that his mother is very ill. It is never made clear whether this information is true, or if the Warden is just trying to get Molina to move faster in getting information out of Valentin.

In the rest of the first act, the only new setting presented in the script is the infirmary, in which scene ten takes place. This scene has some dreamlike elements in which Molina sees his mother and The Spider Woman. The next couple of scenes take place in the cell, and the first act finishes with Aurora in a cage, surrounded by male dancers singing the song "Gimme Love."

The second act is considerably shorter than the first, containing only seven scenes compared to twelve in the first act. The Aurora scenes and movies become more heavily involved in the second act than they were in the first. The designer feels that this is reflective of Molina and Valentin's growing need to escape the pressure of their current prison lives. The film that starts the second act is called "Flame of St. Petersburg". This is the only movie within the play that contains multiple locations. It begins on the stage of a Russian cabaret, moves to the diva's dressing room and concludes with her death on a snowy street.

Scene two in the second act starts in "Limbo" (65) in a daydream conversation between Molina and his mother. Molina has been bringing in food and supplies that Valentin believes have been coming from Molina's mother. It becomes clear that in actuality, it is Molina asking for supplies from the Warden, in order to complete the illusion of Molina's mother stopping by.

The third scene is the climax in the relationship between Valentin and Molina. The two confess, through song, their feelings for each other. The Spider Woman appears in this scene and sings with the men as she sees how their relationship has ended up. She is making it very clear that one or both of these men will soon be dead. At the end of the scene, the two men finally express their love physically, as the lights fade out. The fourth scene seems to overlap the end of the third. The entirety of the scene is a song by the Spider Woman about how it is impossible to cheat death.

Scene five is a very short scene, and is also the last scene that Valentin and Molina have together, before Molina is to be released. The locations in scene six become nebulous at best. The scene becomes a kind of montage of Molina's life after he gets out of prison. It starts with the prisoners singing as Molina heads on his way. It has a short discussion with the Warden and then Molina has a brief but intimate conversation with his mother. It moves to the shop where he dresses windows, and then Molina has a short exchange with Gabriel, the object of his (unrequited) affection. The scene gets back to Molina's mother's place, then to a public phone, where Molina makes a call to Valentin's lover/fellow revolutionary, Marta.

The final scene starts in an interrogation room, where Valentin is getting tortured and a bloodied Molina is thrown in, interrogated and killed. The designer was unsure of his own feelings regarding the end of the last scene of the show. It takes place as though in a movie theatre, with Molina's mother, Valentin, the Spider Woman and others watching the events of Molina's death unfold in front of them. This scene doesn't seem to fit with what has been presented in the rest of the show. While there are many dream-like sequences throughout the show, they are to this point rooted in some real source. This last sequence was most likely written as a way for the story to come full circle, where the final moments of Molina's life become the final moments of his life's "movie" as viewed by those who love him.

As mentioned, this production will be performed in the Andreas Theatre, which is the smaller of two performance spaces at Minnesota State Mankato. It is a 250-seat, flexible space with eight different standard seating configurations. *Kiss of the Spider Woman* will be performed in a shallow, but very wide, proscenium configuration. The designer has worked in this configuration before and is aware of some of the challenges it presents. This configuration is fairly shallow, with only about 23 feet between the seating and the back wall of the playing space (see Fig. C1); this is at its deepest point. This may not seem very shallow, but the scene designer can lose territory very quickly in just providing room for actors to cross behind the scenic elements unseen. This configuration is also very wide, with about 60 feet of breadth from stage right to stage left. This could be manipulated to be narrower, creating some wing space to the left and right sides of the stage.

Another challenge inherent in this particular design will be determining where to have the orchestra situated. As this is the first musical this scene designer has done, it is a new consideration for him. There is a mezzanine area roughly 12 feet above the stage deck level, which has served as a place for the orchestra in past productions. However, this area has also been used as playable stage space. Between production uses, it serves as a furniture storage area. If the director would like to stage parts of the show on the mezzanine level, other accommodations will need to be made for the musicians.

While *Kiss of the Spider Woman* takes place in several different locations, the designer is very interested in trying to modify and change a single set of scenic elements to create all of the different locales with a minimum of time, effort, and crew. In a previous production by this designer, the size and cumbersome-ness of the scenic elements made the scene shifts very difficult and, consequently, these shifts slowed the pace of the show and added a lot of time. In *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, where the transition from dream to reality happens instantly onstage, these shifts will need to be fluid and elegant, and be able to happen quietly in the middle of a scene.

While this is not the largest production the designer has done in terms of disparate scenic locations, many of the challenges inherent in this show will be new and unique for him. The designer expects to be pushed very hard both in terms of organization and creative ability. He does however feel that his time at Minnesota State Mankato both in the classroom and in past productions has prepared him for this exciting undertaking.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Kiss of the Spider Woman made a very long and interesting journey from its start as a South American novel to a major Hollywood film, and then to a Broadway musical. This chapter will be a study of the novel, the film and the musical. It will discuss each of these pieces of art as individual entities, and will talk about how each of these pieces was received from both a critical and a popular perspective. The chapter will also discuss the significance of each of these pieces in their respective media. Puig himself wrote a stage adaptation of the story but that script will not be addressed in this chapter as it has never had a Broadway or significant professional production. Following the study of each of these individual iterations will be a comparative study of the three works together.

Manuel Puig began work on his novel *El Beso de la Mujer Araña* in 1974. In a 1977 interview with Ronald Christ, Puig described his reasons for entering the world of literature:

To live in terms of beauty, that's what I wanted. What helped me in literature was that I could put both things together- reality and beauty; If not in my life, at least in literature. For myself at least, my books are always investigations, researches, certain ways of

looking at problems that are mine, I hope. That research, however, has to be done with an esthetic rigor. The reality must be recreated and sustained at the same time and analyzed at the same time by a wish to create beauty. Beauty, in this case, is form . . . the fact that I was dealing with reality wasn't enough; reality had to be told in terms of beauty, otherwise there was no satisfaction for me. (55-56)

Given his thoughts on life, one can understand his proclivities toward the fantastic in his works. Kiss of the Spider Woman is no exception to this tendency. The reader is transported several times throughout the novel, taken deeply into the stories of a Nazi propaganda film, a psychological thriller about a panther woman, and even a Voodoo zombie picture.

One thing that is recurring in many of Puig's novels is the appearance of 1930s-1940s movies, as they were very important to him in his own childhood. His first novel, Betrayed by Rita Hayworth, is a semiautobiographical coming-of-age story with little to no solid plot. It examines the psychological and social influence of Hollywood movies on an ordinary town in Argentina. The book focuses almost entirely on the first 15 years in the life of Toto Casals, from 1933 to 1948. He becomes obsessed with the films that he regularly attends with his mother. Like others in the community, Casals escapes into the spectacular world of popular culture, accepting and absorbing its perceived social norms. He is, however, troubled about sexuality, particularly his own latent homosexuality.

According to biographer Suzanne Levine, Puig was fascinated particularly with the actresses of the 1930s and '40s. He so loathed the 1970s representation of feminine that broke away from the glamorous sexpot characters of the "Golden Age" of Hollywood, he referred to four of the most popular actresses of the time (Ellen Burstyn, Jill Clayburgh, Meryl Streep and Glenn Close) as the "Four Horsewomen of the Apocalypse" (255).

Puig commented on his interest in pop culture, particularly film, in a 1973 interview with Saul Sosnewski, "For me literature was a secondary thing . . . like listening to music, like looking at a painting . . . All my expectations, all my attention, was on movies"(70). Puig's obsession with classic films combined with his desire to create beauty helps one to understand where he was coming from in his creation of Kiss of the Spider Woman. If ever there was a place in need of some beauty, that place would be a Buenos Aires prison.

The most peculiar thing about the novel is something one notices upon the opening line: the entire book is written as dialogue between the often two (sometimes three to four) characters in the room at any given time. This is typical of Puig's novels. The author gives his readers no context, forcing them to reach their own conclusions as to the sincerity of the person speaking. There are no descriptions of the action that is taking place around these characters, and long lulls in conversation are marked with only a couple of blank lines on the

page. This certainly speaks to Puig's interest in the beauty within the form of writing. He uses the form as the paramount aspect in the telling of the story.

As mentioned previously, Kiss of the Spider Woman was first published in Spanish in 1976, and received international publication shortly thereafter. Since its publication, the novel has been met with mixed reviews. In The New York Times, the review by Robert Coover was less than glowing. While Coover appreciated Puig's stories-within-the-story he concluded that outside of these stories, "there's not much here." Coover thought the novel tended to the melodramatic, and didn't tell much of an interesting story.

In the Latin American Literary Review, David William Foster gave a review of Kiss of the Spider Woman based not only on the novel's stand-alone merit, but also as the novel compared to others in the quintessentially Latin-American style of writing known as magical realism. Foster's review acknowledges the positive qualities in Puig's novel more readily than the review in The New York Times. Foster starts his review with a comparison to another famous author of magical realism, Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Marquez wrote the novel One Hundred Years of Solitude, and later received the Nobel Prize in literature for his later effort Love in the Time of Cholera. "Although it may not attain the stature of *Cien años de soledad* (sic), it is the first novel since Garcia Marquez's that lends itself so readily to both a 'readerly' and 'writerly' reading" (73). What Foster is saying is

that Kiss of the Spider Woman not only tells a compelling story (readerly), it tells it in a complex and delicate way (writerly).

Kiss of the Spider Woman has been published in many languages, including Spanish, English, German, French, Portuguese and Chinese, just to name a few. The novel is still in print as of this writing. This longevity as well as its international appeal signal that not only was Kiss of the Spider Woman a popular and well-received novel at its initial publication, but that the story it tells continues to be relevant.

In 1982, Argentinian director Hector Babenco met with translator and agent Tom Colchie. Colchie represented several Brazilian writers and often did the English translations of their books. Being a fan of Manuel Puig's writing, and wanting to make the transition into Hollywood film making, Babenco asked Colchie if there were any Puig novels that could be made into movies. Colchie replied, "I know of a great book that would be impossible to make into a movie, Kiss of the Spider Woman (Levine 333)." Babenco had recently had some success with his film "Pixote", about a young boy in a Sao Paulo youth detention center. Puig was hesitant to give movie rights to Babenco, as Puig had written a stage adaptation (in Spanish) of the story, and was hoping for a successful American translation and performance of the piece (334). This would financially serve Puig in two ways: he could collect royalties for further performances of a

script he wrote, and the story's stock would be driven up, allowing Puig to charge more for movie rights than Babenco was currently offering.

Puig eventually agreed to give Babenco the rights to direct the piece, but insisted on writing the screenplay, which he would adapt from his less-than-successful stage play. Initially, aging actor Burt Lancaster was in line for the role of Molina. There was some concern about Lancaster's age (he was nearly 70 at the time), but Puig wanted to work with him, and he was willing to look past Lancaster's age because he knew he would get a good performance, and it didn't hurt that the established and award-winning Lancaster was willing to work with this relatively untried director and screen-writer. Puerto Rican actor Raul Julia was signed on for the role of Valentin. Julia's agent Jeffrey Hunter and Hunter's partner Gene Parseghian were enamored with the story and its witty and moving treatment of gay culture and politics. Parseghian had William Hurt as a client, and told Babenco that if anything should happen with Lancaster's involvement, he should keep Hurt in mind (Levine 335). Lancaster's failing health due to heart disease created this exact opening not too much later. Babenco remembered Parseghian's offer, and soon Hurt was contacted about the role of Molina. He accepted the role, but Puig was less than impressed with the casting change. When Babenco managed to sign Brazilian star Sonia Braga, Puig was put somewhat at ease.

“Kiss of the Spider Woman” was eventually finished and premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in France on May 13, 1985. At the festival, “Kiss of the Spider Woman” was well received; William Hurt received the Festival’s award for best actor, and Babenco was nominated for the Palm d’Or. “Kiss of the Spider Woman” was released on July 26, 1985. Though it had a limited release initially, it received a great deal of critical acclaim. In The New York Times, reviewer Janet Maslin said of the film “From its droll, playful opening to its transcendent coda, it has the mark of greatness from beginning to end”. The film received a similarly favorable review from renowned critic Roger Ebert. Ebert was particularly fond of the key performances. “William Hurt . . . creates a character utterly unlike anyone else he has ever played—a frankly theatrical character, exaggerated and mannered— and yet he never seems to be reaching for effects. Raul Julia . . . reveals a poetry that makes the whole movie work. And Sonia Braga, called upon to satirize bad acting, makes a perfect spider woman”. The praise for the film went beyond just the reviews. The film received numerous awards and award nominations, including an Academy Award for William Hurt for his portrayal of Molina. “Kiss of the Spider Woman” was also nominated for Best Picture and Best Adapted Screenplay. Hector Babenco was nominated for an Academy Award for his direction of the film.

While the awards and accolades are indicative of quality work, the social significance of the awards deserves some consideration as well. Hurt’s Oscar

was the first ever awarded to an actor portraying an openly homosexual character. At the time of the writing of this thesis, equal rights for people of non-heterosexual orientation have been making very large strides forward. Conversely, this film was made in the mid-1980s, when homosexuality was still illegal in some parts of the United States.

Fred Ebb saw "Kiss of the Spider Woman" on its opening night in LA in 1985. Following the show, he immediately purchased a copy of the novel and read it from cover to cover that same evening (Levine 359). Ebb was initially drawn to the story, and he was the one who proposed to adapt it to a stage musical. Ebb had a somewhat personal connection with the character of Molina. "I always lived in a fantasy world as a boy," he said "and my fantasy life started to center itself in the theatre when I was old enough to appreciate it in my early teens" (Leve 151).

When Ebb and collaborator John Kander concluded together that this story would make a good musical, they called producer Harold Prince (whose previous credits included *Sweeney Todd*, *Evita*, and *Phantom of the Opera*). Puig was initially slated to write the book for the musical, but struggled greatly trying to reconcile his novel with the story Ebb and the others wanted to tell. Puig's own stage script (non-musical) for the show had a limited release, and almost no real success. Prince said Puig "had no sense of technique necessary in structuring a work for the stage"(Leve 153). Following some indiscreet and

less-than-kind words in regard to the early work being done on the musical, he was removed from the project. Prince then called librettist Terrence McNally to write the book (Levine 361).

A workshop version of the show previewed at SUNY, Purchase in May of 1990 as part of a sponsored series of new musicals. Among the members of the audience were Kander and Ebb, McNally and Manuel Puig. Chita Rivera was in attendance as a guest of Kander and Ebb, with whom she was close. From the beginning, the duo had thought of the musical as a vehicle for Rivera. Before seeing the performance in Purchase, she was hesitant to be a part of the production. Not only was she nearing 60 years old, but she didn't understand (or perhaps didn't like) the film. By the end of the show, Rivera found herself drawn to the character of Aurora (362).

Though Rivera was excited by the potential possibilities, Ebb was less pleased with the results. "We made every mistake in the book," Ebb said; "it was ridiculous. We had been trying to tell two different stories at once, and the audience didn't follow it" (Leve 157). The production was in limbo for over two years, as Kander, Ebb and McNally rewrote much of the show. After the problems in Purchase, hesitant producers insisted there be a reading of the show before they would invest money for a Broadway production (157).

The two years of time off and full reworking of the show was apparently exactly what it needed. *Kiss of the Spider Woman* opened on Broadway on May

3, 1993 in the Broadhurst Theatre. It ran for over 900 performances and closed on July 1, 1995. Aside from just the longevity, the Broadway production was also successful from a critical standpoint. At the Tony Awards, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* was the most successful production that year. It received awards for Best Musical, Best Book of a Musical (to Terrence McNally), Best Original Score (Kander & Ebb), three Best Acting awards (Rivera as Aurora, Brent Carver as Molina, and Anthony Crivello as Valentin) and Florence Klotz received the Tony for Best Costume Design. It was also nominated for five other Tony Awards and six Drama Desk Awards. At the time of this writing, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* has had no other performances on Broadway.

An intriguing thing about the transition of this story from one medium to the next is how much the story changed between each of these iterations. All three versions of the story stay true to the main focus of the relationship between Molina and Valentin. One major difference is in how the movies are used in the story, and what these movies are. In the novel, Puig's imaginary films range from a Nazi propaganda film to a Voodoo zombie picture. In Babenco's movie, the main film that Molina focuses almost exclusively on is a Nazi propaganda piece that masquerades as a wartime love story. In the Kander/Ebb/Mcnally version of the story, Molina relates several stories in a variety of genres. The only one of these movies that crosses over into more than one scene in the show is the film (the title is never said) in which Aurora is portraying the Spider Woman.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about each of these variants is the role of the “spider woman” within the stories themselves. In Puig’s novel, the reference to a spider woman is only used by Valentin to describe Molina. “You. You’re the spider woman, that traps men in her web” (260). The title of the novel seems to indicate that the kisses between Molina and Valentin have “trapped” them in a web of love and loyalty, from which they are both unable (and unwanted) to escape.

The Spider Woman in Babenco’s may be a direct representation of Molina himself. In his telling the story of the spider woman, the audience understands that this is a story Molina himself has created, rather than a re-telling of one of his movies. In the story, a man has washed up on an island, and is nursed back to health by the Spider Woman. When he is healthy again, the woman begins to cry. She knows she cannot leave the island, because her web has trapped her there. Similarly, Molina cannot ever be with Valentin and he feels a foreboding sense of isolation in the idea of being back in the free world. In Molina’s imaginary visualization of the story, the man who washes up on shore is Valentin. Given the established convention of Molina’s self-identification as a woman, it becomes clear that he visualizes himself as the Spider Woman.

It is not until the musical version of this story that the Spider Woman manifests as an actual being that is part of the story. This is a drastic change from the previous incarnations of the title character. As mentioned, she is a

character in an unnamed film Molina relates to Valentin. She is the physical manifestation of death, and her kiss kills whoever is on the receiving end of it. This departure from the previous versions of the Spider Woman is significant because it changes the nature of the character and the entire metaphor. It takes the story to a much darker place and, instead of it being a metaphor for a tragic love story, it becomes a metaphor for the inescapability of death.

CHAPTER III

PRODUCTION JOURNAL

September 23, 2013

Today was the concept meeting for *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. Director Paul J. Hustoles was clearly very excited to be doing this show. He had a great deal of energy and enthusiasm, even though he is still in production for *Les Misérables*, which doesn't open for another week and a half. Hustoles went through a role-call of the production staff and mentioned to me that there isn't a props person yet. I am hoping this will be resolved shortly. I was surprised to notice that the only faculty designer on the show will be the lighting designer, Steve Smith. This is surprising only because in my previous mainstage experiences here at Minnesota State Mankato, I have been the only student designer with the rest of the team filled by faculty. I am interested to see how this experience resembles and differs from those productions.

Hustoles said his first experience with this story came in the form of seeing the film with Raul Julia and William Hurt, for which Hurt won an Oscar for Best Actor. The Latin-American literary style of "magical realism" was intriguing for Hustoles and he wants that notion to be the focus of the show. After seeing a professional tour of the musical in the early '90s, Hustoles thought that this would

be a show that couldn't be done at a university. He felt the sexual and political content would be difficult to work within the context of a student setting. Times have changed, as they are wont to do, and Hustoles feels like this is a piece that will still be not only relevant, but very meaningful to its audience.

Hustoles was not specific to the location or time period he wanted, but he did want his design team to stay true to the script in the notion of it being generically Latin-American and in the recent past. My research will probably go back as far as 20 years and as recent as 3-5 years ago. Hustoles talked about this as a show that takes place in three different worlds. The first world is that of Molina and Valentin's cell; this is where most of the action is, though it is a very confined/harsh environment. The second world is that of the prison outside their cell. There are other parts of the prison used in the show; the warden's office, the yard, the interrogation room. Also, the notion of "what's over the wall?" is very important to the ambitions of all of the prisoners. These areas are important to the show, as they give context to all of the things in Molina and Valentin's cell and in their minds. The third world is the world of the movies Molina relates to Valentin in order to retain both of their sanities. Hustoles described the show as a visceral and dark show; a harsh and sad love story. He wants the audience to feel like they've been punched in the gut and the heart at the same time.

This show will be set in the side proscenium configuration in the Andreas theatre. I am familiar with this configuration, as last year I designed the set for a

production of *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?* in that same configuration. However, I feel like this will be a very different endeavor as Hustoles really wants to consider every inch of this configuration as playable space for the show. He really wants to use the 12-foot tall mezzanine area, and as much of the breadth of the space as possible. Some of the biggest challenges in this show are going to be finding solutions for how to make the instant transitions between the three worlds mentioned above.

Hustoles said that this is a metal show, not a wood show. He meant that in a couple of different ways. The first is literal, in that since this show takes place in a prison, the notion of exposed metal and the gritty, cold and harsh textures that can create. The second is figurative, meaning that this is not a warm and comfortable show, but one that is dirty and dank; one that should make you feel cold and uncomfortable. Smith mentioned that a show like this would serve very well to have open discourse among all of the design staff, giving suggestions to one another, and using the other designs not just to work with your own design, but as a part of it. He mentioned specifically that if I felt a specific lighting style/effect would serve a particular location well, that he would definitely be open to those types of suggestions/ideas.

Some other things Hustoles wants me specifically to consider are how to incorporate the notion of a spider web into the set, and how much of the theatre space I can utilize for my design. He also wants me to consider locations for

placement of the orchestra, as the use of the mezzanine (which is where the orchestra is sometimes located when not used as a playing space) and other atypical locations could make it very challenging to find a proper space for the orchestra.

For next week, Hustoles would like to see some research about the time and place as mentioned. He wants to see some distinctly non-American prisons and how they differ from what we as Americans think of as prison. He also would like some research about the aesthetic of films from the 1930s and '40s. He left us to research the question, "What does torture look like?" I feel like that should give me a lot to work from as far as a starting point for my research.

September 28, 2013

Over the past several days, I have been doing some visual research for the show. I have focused my research into three categories; classic Hollywood, South American prisons and spider webs. In the first category, I found a lot of very interesting images. For this show, I focused on two types of 1930s and 1940s Hollywood films that I thought might contribute to the overall aesthetic. The first of these is film noir. The darkness of these films, the hard shadow lines and the notion of mystery and intrigue are congruent with the feel of the story of Valentin and Molina. The other Hollywood film type I researched is the over-the-top romantic style of classic cinema. The old films starring Fred Astaire and

Ginger Rogers immediately came to mind. The settings were romantic and overdone, the stories and characters fairly campy. That clean, romantic, almost cheesy style corresponds with Hustoles's idea for the feel of Aurora's films.

The second area of visual research I did was on South American prisons. One thing I discovered is that the facilities themselves are not very different from prisons in the United States. The cells are small, the walls are high and the bars are thick. I pulled many images of prison cells that are crumbling; the paint is flaking, but instead of being scraped and repainted, a new coat of paint is just layered over the top. I really like the look of this texture and I think it says a lot about the conditions they let prisoners endure.

The third area of research, the spider webs, yielded few interesting results. While there are some spider webs that stand out, most follow the sort of geometric patterning one is used to seeing. I look forward to presenting all of these images in our meeting on Monday and seeing what the other design team members have to offer.

September 30, 2013

In the production meeting this morning, I presented a packet of research to Hustoles and the other members of the production team. After presenting my research images, the team discussed what they found intriguing and which elements to consider incorporating into the design as I move forward. Hustoles

particularly liked the crumbling, corroded cell imagery. He liked the crumbling paint, the crumbling concrete and the general aging of the elements in the prison. I pointed out that the environments in the photos were rough, hard surfaces. Concrete walls, steel bars and barbed wire create the harsh environment. Hustoles really wants to keep the gritty aesthetic when dealing with the prison; he likes the idea of everything falling apart. The difficulty will be in how to make that transition from the harsh grittiness of prison to the grandiose romanticism of classic Hollywood.

Hustoles would like to use as many levels as we can create to facilitate transitional movement from one permanent level (lighting grid, mezzanine, stage floor) to the next. He would also like to keep some of the downstage area clear to allow for dancing space. Hustoles suggested I move to the model-making part of the process earlier than usual to help me get a feel for the level of depth and dimension he wants for this show. I am ready to do some sketch work and get some of my initial ideas down on paper.

October 1, 2013

I had my first meeting with my advisor John Paul today. It was very brief, as he is trying to finish his work on *Les Misérables*. He took a look at my research and we talked a little about magical realism. We discussed the themes of the show, and I mentioned that from a design standpoint it is mostly about the

contrast of escapism vs. reality, where no matter how often they escape into this beautiful reality of Molina's stories, they are inevitably drawn back to the hard reality that is being stuck in prison. Paul and I discussed different ways of achieving this duality, and he seemed to think I was in a good starting place in the process.

October 5, 2013

I have spent the last several days working on sketches, trying to get some ideas down on paper to present in the meeting on Monday. I have been trying to think of creative ways of making a spider web on stage, as well as using elements discussed in our earlier meetings, lots of steel, maybe barbed wire or chain-link fence, and I am still trying to find a way to incorporate some crumbling concrete and flaking paint. In some of my sketches (see Figs. B2 & B3), I have included the use of a standard-style staircase from the stage deck level to the mezzanine on the stage right side, with the main prison cell in the center, and a spiral staircase from the mezzanine to the lighting grid on the stage left. I am mostly trying to establish some basic playing areas, while working out ways to use the space to its fullest. I look forward to getting some feedback from Hustoles and the other members of the production team. I did not have a meeting with Paul this week.

October 7, 2013

This morning's production meeting began with a discussion of the rehearsal schedule. In the past, productions in this time slot have typically not had a rehearsal on the Sunday following the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF), but Hustoles has decided that the complexity of this show requires it. Hustoles also insisted that everything be performance-ready by the first full tech rehearsal. He expressed his frustration with some technical aspects of *Les Misérables* not being finished until the production was in front of an audience.

Hustoles's response to the scenic sketches was mostly positive; he seems to like the direction in which I am headed. The feedback I received really gave me a lot to go on to move forward. Hustoles pointed out that when dealing with the prison, I should think about the illusion of confinement vs. actual confinement. This can be done in several different ways; the walls of prison bars could be shallower, or they could be broken walls (walls that are not solid from floor to ceiling) to minimize their visual interference for the audience.

Instead of the spiral staircase going from the mezzanine to the lighting grid, we will move it down and it will go from the stage floor to the mezzanine level. As a way of getting from the mezzanine to the grid, a ship's ladder was suggested as an alternative, and I added that perhaps the spider web could stem from that ladder. In talks about the spider web, it was brought up that it would be fun to

see if we can make the spider web disappear until it is lit. This is an interesting prospect. I am going to do some research over the next week to see if I can make that happen in a fun and interesting way. Hustoles asked me to try to find a way to make the whole room flatten if possible. The configuration of seating in this space creates a very shallow but wide playing space. With space at a premium, being able to get everything out of the way to create room to move and dance will be invaluable.

Hustoles did ask for some specific things for the next meeting. He said he would like me to consider a literal cell door, as both the sound and the image of a cell door are very strong and recognizable representations of prison. He asked if we could put the top of the prison cell at an angle to give the spider woman something to climb on. I am not sure if that is a possibility, as I think safety would be a pretty major concern, but I will meet with my technical director (TD) PJ Crowley and George Grubb, the department's faculty TD to discuss it. Hustoles also asked me to consider where/when costume and makeup changes could take place. As far as materials and playing spaces, he told me many of the settings outside the prison could be very metaphysical spaces. The apartments, Montoya's, even the movie/dream sequences could be done through inference and isolation of lighting. Given the nature of the film sequences, I asked Hustoles if he would consider letting me use Aurora's dancing boys as scenic elements. I have been exploring many different options for creating some of

Aurora's scenes, and having living scenery could be fun and visually interesting. Hustoles said he would consider it, depending on how they're used. I am also going to consider how to use metal grating and expanded steel, and see if I can find a place or places to use barbed wire. With all of this information and feedback, I am excited to work on solidifying some of the design elements and getting started on my scale model.

October 13, 2013

I have created some model pieces for the meeting tomorrow. I have also done some sketching of ideas for how to clear the stage, and make things mobile (see Figs. B6-B8). These ideas include the possibility of doing the prison cots as Murphy beds and making them able to fold up and disappear into the prison bars. Also as a possibility, the sink and toilet in the prison cell could similarly fold back or revolve 180 degrees and "disappear" to clear some space upstage.

October 14, 2013

In this morning's production meeting, I presented my sketches as well as the first model pieces. The sketched prison walls I created had few bars, and almost none of the vertical bars went from bottom to top (see Figs. B4 & B8). Hustoles liked the idea, but felt that the broken walls weren't threatening enough.

If the walls were smaller, or there were fewer of them, we could still capture that illusion of confinement without getting in our own way.

I got some very useful feedback from Hustoles about my ideas; he wasn't completely in favor of any of them. He didn't care for the notion of Murphy beds for the prison beds. His thought was that if they were narrow enough, they could be rotated sideways, and their total disappearance would not be necessary. The same could be said for the toilet and sink. If they keep a low enough profile, they wouldn't need to be struck completely.

Hustoles did like the idea of having many walls that weren't permanently fixed on the set, in a combination of chain link and standard prison bars. I presented Hustoles with some ideas for using the male dancers as set dressings, and how some scenic transitions could happen if I were given the option. In doing so, I overstepped my bounds somewhere, and was politely reminded not to give the director blocking notes for the show. We discussed using the mezzanine level for multiple purposes, as well as discussing how the actors can best move from one side of the stage to the other and one vertical level to another. A rope ladder style spider web was shot down as being too difficult for an actor to climb gracefully across. I will need to come up with a better idea for how to make this web structural and climbable.

October 20, 2013

I have spent this week in the construction of a scale model of the scenery for *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. I have been creating pieces for use with a ¼" scale model of the Andreas Theatre (see Fig. D1 & D2). I have opted to expand the mezzanine four feet out from its permanent structure with a wall built at the front of this extension. This extra four feet will allow for more space for actors to cross behind the scenery, and will potentially provide opportunities for storage of smaller scenic elements.

The stairs and landing on the stage right side provide the ability for movement between the floor and mezzanine level, and the landing provides another level on which Hustoles may choose to block some action. There is a spiral staircase on the stage left side from the floor to the mezzanine. This will balance the stairs on the stage right and provide another opportunity for movement between levels. On the mezzanine level, there are two ship's ladders from the mezzanine to the grid. Between these ladders is a wall of chain-link fence. This allows for movement between the mezzanine and the lighting grid, and the chain-link wall could provide another climbable surface. The wall would be on a tracking system that would allow it to travel upstage to downstage and vice versa depending on Hustoles's preference for each scene.

The walls of prison bars I have created should be completely mobile. If they have no permanent structure to keep them in place, when space is needed

for dance numbers and the like they can be completely out of the way. The spider web will be on the stage right side of the mezzanine extension wall from floor to mezzanine level. I feel foolish for not thinking of this earlier, but the web could potentially crawl over to the stage left side along the top of the wall and up to the grid level by replacing the ship's ladder on the stage left side of the chain-link wall. This would allow for a full floor-to grid climbing opportunity, and would also unify the levels in the design.

October 21, 2013

The meeting this morning opened with Hustoles announcing the forthcoming auditions this afternoon. I presented the model to Hustoles and the production team. It was met with very positive response from Hustoles. He appreciated the versatility of many of the scenic elements, and the adjustments he wanted to see were mostly small, simple fixes. Given the flexibility of the smaller pieces, Hustoles changed his mind and asked if the toilet and sink could be completely struck when they are not needed. He asked if the mezzanine extension could be three feet deep instead of four to try to keep as much space available down stage as possible. Hustoles mentioned that I neglected to include barbed wire into the design. I feel like this inclusion will be a difficult challenge; I will need to find a way to include barbed wire in a visually interesting way without it becoming a hindrance for the actors' movements.

Smith asked about how many students Hustoles thought would be needed for a running crew for this show. Hustoles said that since much of the scene shift work would be done by the actors themselves, and due to the simple nature of those shifts, a two person running crew would be sufficient.

October 23, 2013

In my meeting with Paul today, I presented all of the material he hadn't seen yet. I showed him the model I presented in the meeting on Monday. He looked at my model and we discussed the various elements of it. I mentioned that Hustoles was interested in seeing a full ground plan as soon as possible. Paul suggested that given the flexible nature of the design, I might give Hustoles a ground plan with all of the permanent pieces on it, and let him use the scale model pieces to place the scenes to his liking. Paul mentioned that trying to finalize a ground plan would be greatly aided by Hustoles's input. That level of input and collaboration up front will probably save me a lot of time later on, as I will be able to avoid doing too much re-drafting of ground plans for the different scenes. I will make the adjustments to the model as discussed in the production meeting on Monday.

October 26, 2013

I have made all of the changes to the model as discussed in the last meeting. I also created a design for what I would like the window of Montoya's clothing shop to look like. I have asked Crowley to look at different gauges of steel to determine the weight of some of the mobile elements of the design.

October 28, 2013

Costume designer Alisa Bowman presented color renderings of her designs, and Hustoles had a few changes to make based on how the show was cast and with some new considerations for the speed at which different actors would need to change costume. I presented the model with changes, and the reaction was positive. Given the weight for the steel that Crowley found, I asked if the bars could be farther apart than the six inches in the model. Hustoles said I was free to space them farther apart, so long as it didn't look like someone could slip between them. I also showed my idea for the window of Montoya's (the clothing shop), and Hustoles liked the design for the window treatment. As the text for the window signage will be in Spanish, I will try to find a native Spanish speaker to make sure any phrasing is correct.

Other pieces that we will need are a gurney or hospital bed, and a birdcage for Aurora to dance in during the song "Gimme Love." The gurney was something I had expected for the scenes in the infirmary, but the idea of a

birdcage was not something I had considered. This piece was brought up by choreographer Jaclyn Juola; she liked the idea of using it as centerpiece for that dance number. I mentioned that the piece would need to have a pretty small footprint to save space backstage. Hustoles said that the area to hold Aurora could be a circle of only three feet across, so I will consider that when designing the piece.

October 30, 2013

In my meeting with Paul today, we talked about next steps in the process. I told him my plan was to get as much drafting done as possible for Crowley before the next meeting. He agreed that that would be a good step, and to be sure to stay on top of that, as it is likely that additional small pieces may be added throughout the process, as Hustoles starts blocking the show. He also let me know that undergraduate student Sam Goerss is interested in doing props for the show, but she has a class that meets during our production meeting time, and would be unavailable to be at the meetings. I will be sure to ask Hustoles if that is acceptable at the next production meeting.

November 3, 2013

Over the last few days, I have been working on drafting various pieces of scenery so Crowley can prepare for the show to come into the scene shop on

schedule, next Monday. I gave Hustoles my scenic model pieces and a scale ground plan on which to move the pieces for determining scene placement. I am excited see what ideas he presents for the meeting tomorrow, and what questions and requests he has.

November 4, 2013

In the meeting this morning, Hustoles presented a finalized rehearsal schedule for the show. Given the non-standard nature of this production schedule, being able to use the space as soon as possible will be a high priority. We will not have access to the space until at least the 24th of November, due to a production of Harold Pinter's *Betrayal* being performed in that space until the 23rd. Access to the space will not be the only issue that we will face. The Andreas Theatre is currently in a different seating configuration facing one corner of the space. As mentioned, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* will be set in a shallow, wide proscenium. The seating change-over in the space is always quite an undertaking, and in order to make this transition easier, we may be having a special work call to expedite that transition.

Hustoles feels like he has gotten a much better feel for how things will be able to move in the space, having the model at his disposal for the last week. We need a landing at the top of the spiral staircase to allow a smooth transition from the platform to the stairs. Since Crowley's approximate weight for the prison

bar units would make them too heavy to be moved by a single actor, Hustoles asked if there was any way to cut that weight. The solution we have decided on is to cut six inches off the height of each unit, and make each of the smaller units only four feet wide instead of five. This should bring each of the prison bar pieces down to an acceptable weight. Hustoles wants these pieces to be able to move easily around the stage, as well as be able to move from level to level. Hustoles would like the sink in the wall to have working plumbing, as he feels like that small bit of added realism will do a lot to cement the prison cell scenes in reality, and heighten the level of intimacy.

At this point, I need to create elevations for the wall on the mezzanine level, the spider web, and the wall that will go from the floor to the mezzanine level. I will also need to figure out some curtain placement for masking, etc. The paint treatments have been difficult to figure out to this point, because Hustoles would like the spider web to disappear (as much as is possible) when it is supposed to be in the background.

November 6, 2013

In my meeting with Paul today, we talked about different possibilities for a paint treatment for the lower wall unit. My initial thoughts based on the research I have done is that I would like to do a treatment that will look like cinder blocks with paint peeling off. He suggested I look at ways of trying to make the spider

web run into the mortar lines of the cinder blocks to help the web blend in or disappear into its surroundings.

I also showed Paul the draftings I gave to Crowley. Paul said that with the information I showed him, Crowley should be able to get the build started on Monday.

November 10, 2013

I have been working on different paint treatments for the lower wall unit. I have worked mostly in Photoshop to create the look I want (see fig. C5). I met with Hustoles early in the afternoon to see what his preference was. I created a couple of looks; one of which was pretty much just a straight cinder-block treatment, which Hustoles did not care for. The second treatment was made to look like a cinder block wall that had been covered in plaster and painted. The plaster would be cracking in several places, and the painted brick treatment below would be exposed. Hustoles liked the idea of this treatment, but would like to see less brick exposed than was in the sample.

I presented my design at the first rehearsal tonight. The response from the cast was one of general excitement. I am happy about where this design is, and it is always nice to feel a sense of appreciation. I look forward to *Kiss of the Spider Woman* starting its build in the scene shop tomorrow.

November 11, 2013

In the production meeting this morning, I showed the updated paint elevation to the rest of the design team. I explained that it would change slightly in accordance with Hustoles's wishes. The initial color (a beige hue) was too light as well, and I assured Smith that I would try to make it a little darker, and that dirt and rust would also help give it some contrast and darkness. My next step will be deciding curtain placement surrounding the set. Hustoles said he liked the idea of creating a sort of false proscenium with curtains, drawing the focus in to the set and keeping the stage in this configuration from feeling too vast and open. Once the curtains are in place on my groundplan, I need to send an update to sound designer Anna Alex, lighting designer Steve Smith and stage manager Josh Helgeson, just to keep them informed. The cast will be choreographing "Morphine Tango" tonight, and Hustoles asked if I could get some clear vinyl tubing similar to IV tubing before then. I was told that Juola wanted to use it in the dance number for that song. The vinyl tubing was purchased in the afternoon and was cut to the desired lengths; we have a gurney up in storage that was brought down into the space for the same song. I told Juola and Hustoles to let me know if any changes needed to be made.

November 17, 2013

Kiss of the Spider Woman started its construction in the shop last week. Some adjustments were made to the design of the spider web to make it more easily climbable. The initial design of the spider web was very organic, and had the look I wanted, but the angular nature of the design would have made it very difficult to climb. To alleviate this, what I did was start with the notion of a ship's ladder with horizontal rungs about every foot, and centered the design around that. I sent the drafting to Crowley with the horizontal rungs highlighted so that he knows how the ladder part of the spider web should fit together. I also updated my ground plan and sent it to Helgeson and the rest of the production team. It will take some time until significant progress is made on the build, as the department just finished striking a production of *Crumbs From the Table of Joy* in the Ted Paul Theatre. There is also a studio production of *Betrayal* in the Andreas Theatre, so we can't start building in that space until that show closes. Another possible setback to the construction is that the seating configuration in the space will be changing. While *Kiss of the Spider Woman* will be placed in a proscenium-style configuration, *Betrayal* is set with the playing space in the corner of the Andreas nearest the scene shop. Though not a complex undertaking, the seating shift is fairly substantial and can be very time-consuming, making it difficult to get into the space.

November 18, 2013

In the production meeting this morning, there were many new developments made and problems taken into consideration. Crowley, having met with Grubb, informed Hustoles and the production team that it would not be feasible for the mezzanine wall to be mobile. Crowley said that there were several factors that led he and Grubb to this conclusion, such as safety, money and time. The amount of steel needed for just the construction of this show is going to push us to the limits of our budget. Within the confines of this strange build schedule, the complexity of the wall element may be too difficult to finish within the time frame we have. Finally, with the scheduled time and budget, Crowley believed we could not safely achieve the mobility effect of the element as designed. I was not pleased with this conclusion; from a design standpoint, I thought that the movement of that wall would have been visually compelling. I think it also would have been an interesting way of continuing the notion of scenic mobility up to the mezzanine level. Though disappointed, I felt that Crowley would not have presented it as such without exhausting all reasonable possibilities. Hustoles was less convinced. He asked Crowley to reconsider this issue with a different parameter: the wall would not need to be locked into place unless it was in the downstage position. This simplification could possibly alleviate some tension in the budget and the schedule. Crowley said that he

would meet again with Grubb this week, and bring his results into the meeting next week.

After this, the other discussions of the meeting seem pretty minor. We discussed what Hustoles wanted from the prison “beds.” He said they could be very cot-like, but would need to be stable enough to be lifted with somebody on them. I mentioned that I thought we had a couple of army style cots up in our large props storage area and Crowley said that he would bring them down sometime today.

November 19, 2013

The “cots” I thought we had up in storage were actually just stretchers. They were not brought down until this afternoon, so I didn’t have time to put anything decent together. I sketched up some frames that could serve as cots, and Crowley and I built them. I really do not like them, but hopefully they will work for rehearsals until we can get something better figured out.

After the rehearsal tonight, Hustoles sent me a message in regard to the prison cots. He said they were too big. My concern with making them small was that I knew that Molina and Valentin would both be able to lie on the same cot. Hustoles said that as close as they will be, we can make them fairly small.

November 20, 2013

I did further research on prison beds and cots to reflect the type that Hustoles is looking for and, with his approval, I drafted the design for Crowley. He informed me that we shouldn't need to buy more steel to make them, as we should have enough left over to make two of the beds as drafted.

November 22, 2013

I had a meeting with Hustoles today to discuss some changes. While there were many things that need adjusting, many of them were small. The first thing Hustoles mentioned is that there needn't be a phone booth. The initial plan was that toward the end of the show, when Molina calls Marta, there would be a phone booth from which he would make the call. Hustoles said that it would now be a sound effect and we could eliminate the phone booth. Hustoles said that we didn't need a door on the birdcage unit. He suggested I just make the bars far enough apart so a person could easily fit through them. The sign for Montoya's is changing, in that Hustoles wants it to be able to fit onto a single small bar unit. He said the window would need to shift from a horizontal orientation to a vertical one. Hustoles also gave some ideas for what he wanted for Molina's mother's home. Previously it had been discussed as just being a pool of light. While he still wanted to keep it very simple, Hustoles wanted to have something to define the space. He told me to consider just using furniture to establish her space.

Another thing Hustoles wanted me to consider was how to get food and some smaller props onstage quickly and easily, and the easiest way we came up with was just installing a doggy-door style flap on the wall. I told him we could probably place it under the sink. If it is right at floor level, it would be mostly hidden behind one of the cots in its standard position. The only other small thing we talked about was that we decided to put a railing on the stage right staircase. There was no railing in the initial design. My initial thought was that without a railing, it would add to the dream-like nature of the space. While visually interesting, actor safety was a concern; a railing will be added to the stage right side of the staircase.

An interesting new element to be designed is a troika, which is a type of sleigh called for in the first scene of Act II. Hustoles thought this would be an interesting place to bring in another two-dimensional object like the bathtub from Act I. I agreed that it would be a really neat way of carrying that notion into this act. I told Hustoles I will do some research and bring some designs to the meeting on Monday.

The last thing we discussed was the chain link mezzanine wall. Hustoles said that it could remain permanently in its upstage position. I presume that he personally talked to Crowley and Grubb about this, as Crowley was going to try to bring in solutions at the next production meeting. With this finally settled, I am hoping that not too much of the aesthetic of that upper wall is lost.

November 25, 2013

Following the *Betrayal* strike this weekend, Crowley was able to begin moving some of our scenery into the space. In the production meeting this morning, Hustoles was very pleased with our progress to this point, and was confident that we are right on schedule. Many of the notes in the meeting this morning were props notes, but as Goerss is unable to attend the production meetings, I have been trying to keep good notes for her. Some of the scenic things discussed were final placement of masking curtains on the mezzanine, as well as on the outer edges of the playing space for hiding small set pieces.

Crowley and I need to determine final placement for the upper spider web/chain link wall. Between the architectural wall of the building and our scenic piece, there needs to be room for a curtain to mask the doors on the building wall; in front of that curtain, there needs to be room for an actor to climb. Since the web needs to be climbable from both the front and the back, Crowley and I figured we can put hand-holds from the back of the steel web through the chain link for the actor to hang from and climb.

I still need to buy a toilet and a sink for the set. We have no toilet in stock and none of the sinks we have are the correct size or style for our purpose. I am also going to look through our furniture storage to see what I can find for the Warden's office and a fainting couch for the opening Aurora sequence. I also presented my research for the "troika" unit. What I found interesting is that in

looking at troika images, I assumed that a troika was a specific kind of sleigh. What I came to find out is that the word troika actually refers not to the sleigh, but to the team of horses by which the sleigh is pulled. According to Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, a troika is generically used as "a group of three people, things, countries, etc." As it is used in the Russian, a troika is a "team of three horses running abreast." Within the context of this show, the "troika" unit that I will be creating will be represented by a sleigh, with three of Aurora's dancing men abreast in a harness pulling it.

December 1, 2013

A major adjustment will need to be made to the spider web or at least the wall to which it is attached. Over the mezzanine hangs a very large ventilation shaft right where the spider web is supposed to go. After much consideration and a meeting with Crowley and Hustoles together, the best solution is to flip the spider web units horizontally. The web from the mezzanine to the grid will now be on the stage right side. The web from the floor to the mezzanine level will now be on the stage left side. Crowley agreed that since the lower web is still under construction, and the upper wall hasn't been assembled yet, this adjustment should be a fairly simple one from a construction standpoint. Having been unable to block the scenes without the web units actually in place, Hustoles's adjustments will also be less than they could have been.

I have also pulled some rehearsal furniture that has been getting used. I made an elevation for the unit for Molina's mother and I will bring that into the meeting tomorrow. Also, I purchased a toilet and a sink for the set, so hopefully those will be able to be put into place soon.

December 2, 2013

This morning we had the final production meeting for *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. While I feel like we are on schedule, it still makes me a little uneasy that we will have no more full meetings. Since we don't open for almost two months, it seems like an incredible amount of time. We discussed having a meeting when we get back from winter break, but the general consensus was that we will be fine without it. If any major issues come up, extra care will just need to be taken to make sure they are resolved with the entire team on board.

I presented the elevation for the unit for Molina's Mother, but Hustoles thought it was too happy. He suggested I go a little darker and simpler. He also suggested the fainting couch I pulled be struck. It is too large for the purposes of the bathtub sequence. He suggested I pull a small stool or something that can quickly and easily be moved by one person. Since the other scene changes will happen so quickly, starting the show with a really slow change would be a bad way to set up the pacing for the rest of the show. Hustoles would also like a chair separate from the ones in the Warden's office to use for a "torture chair."

December 6, 2013

I am a little disappointed in the amount of progress made this week on the construction of the set. I know Crowley is frustrated as well. I don't think we are too terribly far behind but with the seating change in the space, it has slowed construction to a crawl. Crowley told me he thinks we can still finish on time. I have gotten all of my paint mixed and shown samples to Smith and Hustoles for final approval. The only sample I haven't done yet is for the floor. I am planning on doing a treatment that will have a stamped concrete look. This will be very subtle as I do not wish to draw much attention to it, nor to firmly use it to set a location.

December 13, 2013

Some nice progress has been made on the set this week, including facing on the main wall unit. The initial paint treatment on the prison bars did not hold up to the amount of handling to which these units are subjected. The paint is not sticking to the steel like I hoped it would from my initial test. We will have to clean, prime and repaint the steel, which is frustrating.

Today was the last day of classes in the semester and from here, we have a month off from classes for winter break. This also means that the shop will be closed for a month. I told Crowley that I will be gone until after the first of the year. He said that he was going to be around until then and would finish up

construction (at least of the major elements) on his own. I said that would be ideal, because if construction was mostly done by the time I got back into town, I could paint the set pretty much on my own in the week and a half until classes started. Hopefully all will go according to plan. If Crowley gets as much done as he has assured me he can, I feel very confident that we can finish this set ahead of schedule, which would be great. If I could start tech week with a completed set, I would be thrilled.

December 23, 2013

Over the last few days, I have been working remotely in North Dakota on the Aurora movie poster that Molina hangs in the cell. When I asked Hustoles what movie he would like the poster to be from, he said that “Flame of St. Petersburg” would be fun and I agreed. I have sent Hustoles a few different iterations of it, and it seems we have settled on a final design. I took pieces from old 1930s and 1940s cabaret posters, and put them together. With that image, I added in my own text to really sell it as an old Hollywood film. I really like the final image (see Fig. C8), and it seems Hustoles does as well.

January 7, 2014

Today was my first day back at the school since the end of last semester. I became incredibly nervous when upon my arrival I discovered that no work has

been done on the set over the break. I was assured by Crowley that I was going to have a mostly paintable set to come back to. While I still feel like it's possible for things to finish on time, I am very nervous that there has been no progress over the break. I tried to contact Crowley via phone call, text message and email, and have not as yet heard from him. Grubb will be in tomorrow and hopefully he will know at least what Crowley has planned for the crew. I know Crowley is out of town, but Grubb is his advisor and he plans on having the shop open for people to get some shop hours in before classes start. Hopefully, he will have a list of things on which the crew can work.

January 8, 2014

I still have received no word from Crowley. I visited Grubb in his office to raise my concerns about the lack of contact. He said that his attempts to contact Crowley have also been met with no success. He mentioned that Crowley had some personal issues toward the end of the semester and he was not sure Crowley would be returning. While I was not pleased with this level of uncertainty, I asked Grubb what my options are. He agreed that with the short schedule to finish this build, idleness was not a feasible option. Grubb said that if he didn't hear from Crowley by this afternoon, he would take over as the TD to finish the build. Later in the day, still not hearing from Crowley, Grubb let me know that he would be assuming the role of TD. I printed copies of all of my draftings for him,

and we took a walk through the Andreas Theatre and discussed how much is left to be finished. As we talked, I let him know my priorities for the order in which things would ideally be finished. He and I agreed on the notion that by the first tech rehearsal I would like every piece of scenery to be usable. I told him that if everything were at least usable by the first tech rehearsal, I could have it finished before we have an audience. My initial goals were much more ambitious than that. While I am not particularly happy finishing that close to show opening, given the circumstances, I can't be too upset about that possibility.

January 16, 2014

This was the first week back in classes and with a staffed shop. A lot of progress has been made and I attended the rehearsal tonight. While the show has made nice progress, our first tech rehearsal is tomorrow night. I feel like we will have usable versions of everything we need. Because of my ambitions leading up to the winter break, it has felt to me that the production is behind schedule. In reality, we are pretty much right where we need to be. I did not realize until the rehearsal tonight that Grubb never received an elevation for Molina's mother's house. It hadn't been mentioned in any of the rehearsal notes up until tonight and I have been running on the assumption that he had everything. I profusely apologized to Grubb for this oversight, and he said not to worry as the piece is very simple, and can easily be in place for first tech

tomorrow. I am grateful to Grubb for being so understanding of how stressed I am feeling. He certainly did his best to make this error seem less egregious than it was.

January 17, 2014

Tonight was the first tech rehearsal for *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. While I took a lot of notes for things that need to be finished, I feel like everything on my list is pretty manageable. Many of the things are paint related, which is what I expected. Now that everything is at least usable, it is time to work on finishing all of the pieces and adding the necessary details.

Many experienced members of our shop staff (myself included) will be gone next week to the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KCACTF). At the festival, I will be displaying my design for *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. This display will include a color scale model of the set, my research images and sketches I did early in the design process, and my draftings for all of the pieces in the show. I will also be displaying some photos of the set in its current state that I took during the rehearsal tonight. I think I got some decent photos during the rehearsal, though I wish the set was closer to completion than it is. Both Hustoles and Paul have expressed positive feelings about my displaying it in the Design, Technology and Management exposition at KCACTF. I am proud of this design and it is heartening to receive such encouragement.

January 23, 2014

Today I received my feedback for the *Kiss of the Spider Woman* display at KCACTF. The response to my design and display was overwhelmingly positive. Both respondents were impressed with the amount of information I displayed with my model. They liked that they could look at my research images and my early sketches, and from those early images they could easily see how those images transitioned into the final design. Both respondents were impressed with the quality of the model as well. The only negative feedback I received on the model is that they wished I had removed the back wall of the Andreas theatre on the theatre model. They felt that without that wall, it would have been easier to see the model from the “audience perspective.”

January 24, 2014

During the KCACTF awards ceremony this evening, I received second place in the category of Regional Scenic Design for my work on *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. The awards in the regional category are voted on not by the respondents of the exposition, but by the faculty members from throughout the region who are in attendance at the festival. I was elated to receive this recognition, especially in consideration of the overall quality of the other designs I saw in the exposition. This response has made me even more eager to get back to Mankato, finish the set, and have the show open.

January 26, 2014

Since we got back from KCACTF, I have been busy painting different elements of the set. I finished the main wall and the floor, and all that is left are some of the smaller pieces and some detailing and touch-up work. I found a chair that I am interested in using for a chair in the torture scenes. It has a steel frame, which I like because it has a more harsh look than a standard wooden chair. It is also something to differentiate it from the chairs in the Warden's office.

In the rehearsal tonight, Hustoles said he would like the hanging sign for Montoya's to be in a horizontal orientation rather than a vertical one. As a vertical unit it folded in half, with a seam running vertically through the sign. This is not a problem because that vertical would only cross through one letter of the sign. It was done this way because we were really close to our budget, and Crowley didn't think we could afford to buy another sheet of plexiglass. The window was put together with two larger scraps that together would fit the size we are going for. I told Hustoles that since it was now being moved back to a horizontal orientation the seam between pieces of plexiglass would now go through the entire window design. I expressed my concern with our being so close to over budget, and Hustoles asked how much a new sheet was. I told him it was about \$100 (which is what I remember paying in the past, but I haven't looked recently), and he said to just go ahead and buy a sheet. So I will take care of that tomorrow.

Hustoles also didn't care for the sink unit as it looks when it is in its downstage position coming out of the wall. He said, and I agree with him that in the framework in which it is held, it really loses the look of a sink. When he asked me what could be done about it, I said I didn't know, and I would try to paint it in such a way that it would at least look less out of place.

January 28, 2014

Tonight was our first preview night. There are some minor things to fix and finish for tomorrow night, but we are in good shape. Tomorrow night, there will be a crew filming the preview. I am told they will be filming in high definition with a camera crew of four or five cameras. This will be the first time anything like this has been done in our department and I am excited to see the results.

January 29, 2014

The remaining touch-ups on the set got finished today. Tonight I saw the show with the rest of the theatre majors in attendance. The performance went well and Hustoles seems optimistic about the filming. I was surprised to see so few in attendance, but was reminded that the fairly large cast for *As You Like It*, the next main stage production, is in rehearsal.

February 3, 2014

The first weekend of the run is finished and I was given no notes from stage management. Upon inspection of the set, I found some things that were in need of repair and fixed them. Some of the prison bar units were in need of touching up. Also, the soft flaps attached to the wall to mask the seams for the sink unit were replaced, as they were torn, and looking shabby. Once these flaps were replaced, I had to paint them to match the wall. One of the nice things about the amount of texture in this paint treatment is that it is not difficult to paint touch-ups and have it match properly.

February 7, 2014

There was a respondent here from KCACTF who saw a performance of the show and talked about his reaction to it. Though I displayed this design at our regional festival only a couple of weeks ago, this production is technically a participating entry for the festival next year. The respondent really enjoyed the production as a whole. He enjoyed the performances given by the actors, he thought the play was well-directed and that the moments of levity were well-timed within the production. He was also very complimentary of the technical elements of the show as well. He really liked the set, and how well it worked in tandem with the other visual elements of the show, including Bowman's costumes, Smith's lights and Hustolet's staging. The respondent really liked the use of

shape in the set; he liked the very hard-edged rectilinear shapes of the prison, and how for Aurora's scenes, many of the elements were softer and had more organic shape. He also liked that though there were a lot of heavy steel elements in the show, things moved quickly from one scene to the next.

February 9, 2014

Today was the final performance of *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. We struck most of the set this afternoon. Because of the complexity of how some of the elements came together, the strike was not completely finished within our allotted time. I am incredibly proud of how well things turned out with this show. Even with the strange build schedule and TD complications, I feel like the show went well, and it is a production of which I feel honored to have been a part.

CHAPTER IV

POST-PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

The ten performances of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* took place in the Andreas Theatre at Minnesota State Mankato from January 30 to February 2 and from February 5 to February 9, 2014. Aside from some minor paint touch-ups between the two performance weekends, there were no scenic issues throughout the run. The scene designer began this process expecting to be pushed to both his organizational and creative limits. This expectation was met in many ways throughout the process of designing *Kiss of the Spider Woman*.

The set needed to be able to move quickly between the fantasy world of Aurora and the reality of the torturous prison in which most of the characters live. The speed and articulation of the scene changes was imperative, and forced the designer to spend a lot of time working out ways in which to facilitate these changes. Along with the scene changes, much consideration was given to how best to use the space. Files designed a set in this theatre and configuration before, for a production of Edward Albee's *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?* However, the scale and complexity of this show demanded further deliberation than he had been able to commit to his previous design with regard to how to utilize the space.

Better organization was an important goal for Files as he approached this design. Files learned from previous designs that proper preparation early on in the process would aid in the ability to make adjustments and correct problems as they arise. Files made a very deliberate effort to stay focused and finish his assigned tasks on or ahead of schedule. It had been a struggle for him in past productions, and one that he looked forward to trying to overcome. While there were some difficulties along the way and many adjustments made throughout the process, the designer felt like his deliberation and concerted efforts early on made it much easier to deal with those difficulties and make those adjustments.

The themes Files mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis were sexuality, love, trust and escapism. In the early analysis of the script, he discussed the theme of sexuality and the polarity of cultural standards of masculinity and femininity. This theme is certainly among the most prominent in terms of the characters around whom the story takes place. However, it is an idea that is difficult to express within the context of Hustoles's concept of the show. The same is true for the themes of love and trust. The only one of the previously discussed themes that the designer was able to really consider incorporating into the final scene design was that of escapism; more specifically the notion of escapism vs. reality.

Files used several different methods in an attempt to create that sense of escapism. The first method used was designing scenic pieces that could be

easily movable by one to two cast members. Files worked with Technical Director (TD) PJ Crowley to establish an appropriate size for the prison bar units so they would be light enough for efficient movement. The toilet and sink units needed to be operable by one stagehand backstage. The importance of this was that a person's mind can escape into a daydream almost instantly, and it was important to the designer to express that notion scenically.

Another way of approaching the idea of escapism was giving the scenic pieces that were for Aurora's movies a distinctly different look than the pieces for the prison. The pieces for the prison were all very rectilinear in nature, with realistically harsh colors and textures. The Aurora pieces were very different. They were very bright in color, with curvilinear edges and little to no surface texture. By making the Aurora pieces drastically different from the aesthetic of the real world, the designer was attempting to establish the fun and whimsical world of the Hollywood films to which Molina and Valentin escape.

From the onset of the production, the designer decided to carry out the notion of a literal conception of the prison cell. That was the starting point around which the rest of the scenery was designed, because many of the most important scenes in the show are intimate ones between Molina and Valentin. As *Kiss of the Spider Woman* is their story, their space needed to be the central focus. The colors for the prison were also kept to a subdued palate. Files did this for several reasons. In Files's research, many of the prisons he found had muted tones on

the walls. Another reason for the color choices was that Files anticipated a lot of spectacle from lighting designer Steve Smith. Having worked with Smith before, Files was very familiar with his ability to use light and color to create a sense of mood and location. By keeping the color palate unobtrusive, he was attempting to give Smith as many color and texture opportunities as possible to add visual interest to this fantastical story.

In the concept meeting for this show Hustoles said that this was a “metal” show and not a “wood” show. He meant that this was a show that was meant to be hard and cold, not comfortable or inviting. Files achieved this literally by including a lot of steel in the design. The use of expanded steel as a surface on the stage right platform and staircase, the spiral staircase and, of course, the steel prison bars and beds reinforce this notion. Steel was also used to make the spider web and mezzanine wall. Files even selected a metal-framed chair for the “torture chair” in the interrogation office because it looked more uncomfortable.

Upon reflection of the production process, one of the things with which Files found to be the most interesting was how each member of the team communicated in production meetings. The different levels of experience among the team members and how that variation in experience manifested were things Files observed from the onset of the process. Smith, as the only faculty member on the design team, was very comfortable offering suggestions to help his fellow designers. He was also unafraid to ask questions of the other designers to

ensure clarification for the team. Taking on his first mainstage production, Crowley had a much less assertive attitude in meetings. While comfortable within his own role in the show, he seemed hesitant to give opinions or suggestions with regard to the other team members, perhaps for fear of overstepping his bounds. Costume Designer Ali Bowman was confident and professional throughout the process, and was very clear in her ideas and expectations. For his own part in meetings, Files enjoyed the process, and felt that his own ideas and contributions were well received.

After *Kiss of the Spider Woman* closed, Smith told Files he liked the scene design as a whole, and was impressed at how quickly the show was able to get into the space and how early in the process the prison bar units were finished, allowing the actors ample time to work with them. While credit for this goes primarily to Crowley and the scene shop workers, Smith said that it would not have been possible without effective communication between the designer and TD from early in the process. He also expressed that he would have liked more suggestions from Files in production meetings. He felt that Files communicated his own ideas very well, but had he given more thought to other design areas, his suggestions could have benefitted the production as a whole.

Files was very pleased with the outcome of this design. The positive response to his work from the Minnesota State Mankato faculty, as well as the faculty and respondents at the Kennedy Center American College Theater

Festival (KCACTF) was heartening to Files, as it reinforced his self-confidence on the project. One of the best compliments he received about the design was from the KCACTF respondent who came to see the show during the second weekend. This respondent liked the use of line and color in the design, and how freely the scenes shifted. The respondent was also purposeful in mentioning how well all of the designs worked together. While he appreciated the individual comments regarding the look of the set, Files feels that the greater success is in how well the designs worked in tandem to tell the story.

One of the greatest collaborations Files had in this production was with Hustoles. In giving Hustoles the scenic model with a blank printed groundplan and allowing him to play with location and mobility of scenes, he handed over some control as the designer. Files was confident that this trust was well-placed, and was proven correct. Hustoles was excited to have the opportunity to try a lot of different scenic possibilities. This particular collaboration gave Files new perspective on the notion of different roles within a production, and how important it can be to trust the other members of a production team.

While the process went well and Files was pleased with the design and execution thereof, there were some things that in retrospect could have gone more smoothly. With a more thorough investigation of the space, the adjustment to the design of the mezzanine wall and upper spider web unit never would have needed to happen. The designer also wishes he had spent more time figuring

out a way to make the porcelain sink look more appropriate. While the scene shop at Minnesota State Mankato was not equipped to drill through porcelain, Files felt that had the TD and scene shop crew been given more exact specifications for the desired look, a more appropriate aesthetic solution could have been found.

Another area of improvement could have been to do more tests early on for methods of painting bare steel. For example, if Files just used black spray paint/ primer from the beginning, he could have saved the shop staff a lot of labor hours that were spent using brush-on primer and paint. He also could have saved the shop money spent on those supplies. In the future, details like those could prove to be critical.

In this production, Files learned exactly how valuable proper communication between the designer and TD is. Upon Crowley's departure from the production, Files was very shaken. When faculty TD George Grubb took over, Files felt anxiety about whether or not he had given Grubb enough information to finish the set efficiently and effectively. While he attempted to send Grubb everything he had given to Crowley, there were many small adjustments for which it was not worth creating a new drafting, and so needed to be discussed. Grubb was very reassuring and did his best to alleviate his concerns. He told Files that because of the preparation he and Crowley had done earlier, the show was well prepared to finish on schedule. Grubb felt that the show was maybe

under-drafted from a scene design perspective. He felt that the design draftings may not have contained enough information to successfully communicate to the shop staff the design. Having seen the amount of detail in Crowley's draftings, Grubb said this may not be the case.

There were many successes and failures in the process of the scene design for *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. Files learned a lot from this production, and these lessons will definitely serve him in future designs. While the task of designing his first musical was artistically challenging, the designer felt that through research, hard work and an open mind, this challenge was effectively met. Files felt like the greatest success in this production was the level of collaboration within the production team. He felt that as a team, each member was effective in helping one another bring to life the lust, love, horror and escapism in the story of *Kiss of the Spider Woman*.

CHAPTER V

PROCESS DEVELOPMENT

Before beginning his post-graduate education at Minnesota State University, Mankato, Master of Fine Arts (MFA) candidate Noah J. Files received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre Arts from Minot State University in Minot, ND. He also completed minors in English, Graphic Design, and Music. As an undergraduate, his focus was primarily in the performance side of theatre. He found a niche in that small department in musical theatre. His background as a singer trained for opera made this specialty a very natural fit for him.

While remaining an active performer, he started to take very assertive steps forward in the technical areas of theatre as well. Over the next few years, he served as a sound designer, a props master, a scenic artist and a technical director. Unsure of his educational interests, and wanting to perform professionally, Files moved to New York City before completing his undergraduate degree. After a couple of years pursuing the life of a performer, he found that he had more marketable skills while serving as the Assistant Technical Director of the Liederkrantz Opera Theatre. Realizing that the professional acting lifestyle was not what he wanted, Files began to review his other options. Wanting to share his passion for the theatre with others, Files

decided that the best way to accomplish that goal would be to pursue a teaching career. He went back to Minot State to finish his degree, with the goal of looking into graduate programs. While in his last couple of years at Minot State, Files was given the opportunity to design shows for the university's summer stock program. In his last year as an undergraduate, Files designed the scenery for the department's production of *A Doll's House*, for which he received a Certificate of Merit from the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KCACTF). It was during this production that Files realized his interest and growing aptitude in the area of scene design.

His interest in the MFA program at Minnesota State University, Mankato stemmed from not only the number of productions done each calendar year, but also the number of fully realized productions he would be able to design in his time there. The rigorous performance schedule, combined with Minnesota State Mankato's various successes at the Region 5 (KCACTF), made the program very appealing. Files was accepted into the graduate program in the spring of 2011, with his enrollment to begin in the fall of that year.

Files's first scene design at Minnesota State Mankato was a production of Frederick Knott's *Wait Until Dark*. The show was directed by faculty member Heather Hamilton, and the performances took place in October of 2011. Files found out that he was designing the piece on the first day of classes that fall. The process of designing that show was very daunting for Files. The show

represented two very important firsts for the scene designer. It was the first design of his graduate school career and also the first time he had ever designed for a thrust-style configuration. Having only designed for proscenium spaces, Files was unsure of how to effectively use the space. Files was pleased with the outcome of his work on *Wait Until Dark*. He felt that the design was successful, due in large part to the quality of work of those around him. The general feedback he received from both fellow students and faculty members was that it was aesthetically pleasing, realistic and appropriate. Many of the criticisms during Files's defense of the project revolved around the weaknesses in his writing and some communication problems throughout the process.

While working on *Wait Until Dark*, Files was enrolled in several classes that aided his process and would prove to be very useful in his development as a scene designer. In his Theatre Research class, Files learned the importance of being able to discern the difference between reliable and unreliable sources of information as an important part in the research process. This class also aided his academic writing abilities, and gave him more confidence in his theatre scholarship. As his goal was to become a teacher, this push into the scholarly side of theatre was very valuable.

The Drafting for the Theatre class gave Files a great deal of knowledge in the more mechanical side of scene design. This experience gave Files a lot of help in developing a method to express to his future technical directors (TDs) the

aesthetic he wished to achieve. That he took this class while working on a realized scene design could not have been more useful to Files, as he was able to directly apply his class skills to the design of that production. In the Scene Design I class that semester, Files learned how important it is to develop a consistent process in each design experience.

In his next semester at Minnesota State Mankato, Files continued his theatre education with three classes. In Theatre History I, Files learned about the origins of theatre. He also learned a great deal about how theatre was viewed throughout history, and how the practitioners throughout history have created and produced their works. Files was fascinated by the evolution of theatre technology, as well as how much politics and religion affected theatrical practices throughout history.

In the Styles and Ornamentation class, Files learned about the history of architecture and furniture, and how visual styles have evolved through the centuries and across the globe. This class was particularly interesting to him because it had many ties to his Theatre History class, and also gave him a frame of reference for the aesthetic of different periods of world culture.

The third class in which Files was enrolled was a Theatre Management class. In this class, Files had the opportunity to learn about the work that goes into running a theatre, from choosing a season to the payment of staff salaries.

Toward the end of the semester, he also was able to take advantage of a performance opportunity in the form of a small chorus role in the department's production of *The Phantom of the Opera*. Files used this performance as a graduate out-of-area project. He was happy to get on stage and was praised by the director for both his performance and professionalism.

Files's third semester at Minnesota State Mankato was not only incredibly busy, but incredibly rewarding as well. On the first day of classes, he auditioned for and received a leading role in the department's production of David Mamet's *November*, directed by fellow graduate student Rusty Ruth. It was a lot of work for Files and the amount of memorization proved to be a sizable challenge. Paul expressed concern that by performing in productions, he might be taking on more responsibility than he could handle, and asked to be consulted about future auditions. Shortly after *November* closed, Files was contacted by department chair Paul J. Hustoles about joining the cast for his production of Machiavelli's *The Mandrake*. Files initially declined as he was afraid it would interfere with *Cactus Flower*, his next scene design. Hustoles met with Files and Paul to reassure them that arrangements could be made to avoid overwhelming time conflicts. With this reassurance, Files agreed to take on the responsibility of being in the show, though it was fairly late in the rehearsal process. While the time commitment put a strain on his other endeavors, Files enjoyed his part in the show and was glad to have been involved.

His on-stage efforts were only a part of Files' third semester. His technical work and classroom efforts made up much of his mental focus. He was enrolled in a class in Technical Direction, which proved to be difficult for Files. The biggest challenge in that class was an assignment working on the structural engineering calculations for a set design given to the class by co-instructor Paul. Files's inexperience in the mathematical elements of technical direction made that assignment a difficult hurdle to get over.

That fall, Files was also enrolled in Costume Design I, in which he gained a lot of insight into the process of costume design, and the considerations one needs to make when actually designing a show. In this class, Files was also able to hone some of his digital art skills by creating many of his designs in a digital format, including his final project.

In his Dramaturgy class, Files expanded on the research skills he learned from the Theatre Research class he took earlier in his graduate career. The depth of research he did into each production for this class would be the standard needed for all of Files's future design endeavors.

Another significant part of that semester was Files's work on the scene design for *Cactus Flower*. *Cactus Flower* was directed by Paul Finocchiaro, and was performed in the Ted Paul Theatre in November. This design was very difficult for Files for several reasons. As previously mentioned, for much of the early portion of his design process, his time was split between work on *Cactus*

Flower and rehearsals for *The Mandrake*. His lack of proper preparation forced Files into the position of constantly playing catch-up throughout the production process. In the defense for the project, the response to the aesthetic of the design was largely positive. For the design as a whole, the size and/or ungainliness of some of the scenic elements became an issue, as the scene changes (of which there were many) became drawn out, adding a lot of time to a show that needed to move very quickly.

In the spring semester of Files's second year, he experienced his most exhausting and difficult semester of his graduate career. He had four classes that semester, as well as another scene design opportunity. In his Theatre History II class, Files learned about different theatrical movements and styles starting with the English Restoration, where Theatre History I left off. Files enjoyed this class, as Hamilton gave each of the graduate students the opportunity to put together a 50-minute lecture about a specific author or movement. Files was happy about this, as it allowed him his first opportunity to present and teach in a formal lecture setting. Hamilton also assigned several undergraduate students to each graduate student and, one day a week, they would lead a discussion among the group about both the textbook reading assignment, and the play the class was assigned to read.

In Scene Design II, Files had a chance to express his ideas in ways not usually possible within the confines of realized productions. For the class

projects, the designers were given limitless budgets to design their hypothetical productions. This helped Files grow, as the lack of budgetary restriction, or practical consideration for how things would need to be built, allowed him to break out of his habit of “thinking like a TD” in the words of Paul.

Files also took Theatre Theory & Criticism, in which he learned more about theatre history, but from a different perspective. There was a lot of discussion about the history of theatre, but focused through the lens of the more academic and social perspective. It was interesting for Files to learn not just about the theatre that was being written and performed, but how that theatre affected its environment and vice versa.

The fourth class Files took was a class called Drawing & Rendering. This class was co-taught by Paul and Costume Designer David McCarl. In this class, Files was challenged to grow in his technique in drawing both architectural and mechanical objects as well as draped fabric. While being taught by two instructors with two distinctly different teaching styles was at times frustrating, Files was pleased with the strides he made as an artist.

That spring, Files had another scene design opportunity that semester in the form of a studio production of Edward Albee’s *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?* This was a studio production directed by fellow graduate student Shelley Whitehead. While Files was generally happy with the final outcome of the production, the process was difficult. His technical director’s inexperience proved

to be a hurdle, and Files spent a lot of extra time trying to use wood putty and paint to cover construction mistakes. Whitehead was also challenging to work with, due to some of her indecisiveness. Files felt the design was successful and he learned a lot about the importance of flexibility in a designer's relationship with a director.

The fall of Files's third year began with another performance opportunity. Files was cast in the department's opening mainstage production of *Les Misérables* in a couple of small named chorus roles. While Files was happy to be on stage again, his favorite experience in being a part of *Les Misérables* was meeting and working with the visiting guest artist Neil Dale. Dale was hired to play Jean Valjean in the production. Files admired both his skill as a performer and his graciousness and enthusiasm, which seemed infectious throughout the rest of the production's cast.

Files was enrolled in two classes in the fall semester. In Sound Design I, Files was given the opportunity to step away from the visual side of theatre and learn about how important the aural experience can be to a production. While Files had designed sound for shows as an undergraduate and even received awards for his work in this area, this class allowed him to experiment with unfamiliar technology and software. The thing that Files found most interesting about the class was the vast divergence of interpretations the individuals had to the same script.

Files was also enrolled in Scene Painting that fall. In this class he improved upon his skills as a painter; he also gained experience in using some techniques with which he was previously unfamiliar. Having previous experience as a painter, Files gained invaluable perspective in the class from being taken to task with his weaknesses, the greatest being the speed at which he completed painting projects. Starting in early October, Files began production meetings for *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, Files's thesis show. The process for this production has been addressed in the previous chapters of this thesis.

Outside of his coursework, performance, and design opportunities in his time at Minnesota State Mankato, Files also received a Graduate Assistantship to work in the scene shop for the Department of Theatre & Dance. While Files had spent a lot of time in scene shops both as an undergraduate and professionally, he learned new and valuable skills while working on nearly all of the productions at Minnesota State Mankato. Files received a lot of hands-on experience in theatrical rigging while working with the fly system in the Ted Paul Theatre. He also got an introduction to the relatively new field of theatrical automation during the department's production of *Les Misérables*. Files helped his colleague Joel Schiebout (the Technical Director of the production) with the assembly and set-up of an automation system that was used to control the rotation of a revolve (turntable) that was 32 feet across. In Files's first semester at Minnesota State Mankato, he learned how to weld while working on the department's production

of *Altar Boyz*. This is something that Files was excited to learn and his proficiency improved greatly as he was given many opportunities to practice and develop this skill.

Another new opportunity for Files came in the fall of his third year at Minnesota State Mankato. That fall, at his request, his Graduate Assistantship shifted allowing him to work for five hours per week in the department's costume shop. While he learned a lot about the design process in the Costume Design class, he felt that having hands-on experience in costume construction would give him a better understanding of that side of production. As a theatre practitioner and aspiring educator, the benefits of such an experience were very appealing.

While Files's long-term goal is to teach at the university level, he feels that in order to be an effective instructor, working professionally in the field would be an incredibly valuable experience. In his time at Minnesota State Mankato, Files has grown as both a theatre scholar and practitioner. Files hopes to continue the meaningful relationships that he has developed with both his colleagues and instructors throughout his graduate experience. His graduate education has not been strictly academic; he has learned many valuable life lessons that he will bring with him as he moves away from Minnesota State Mankato and toward the future.

APPENDIX A

RESEARCH IMAGES



Fig. A1 - Prison Cell



Fig. A2 - Prison Cell



Fig. A3 - Prison Cell Block



Fig. A4 - Prison Halls



Fig. A5 - Classic Hollywood



Fig. A6 - Classic Hollywood



Fig. A7 - Classic Hollywood

APPENDIX B

EARLY SKETCHES

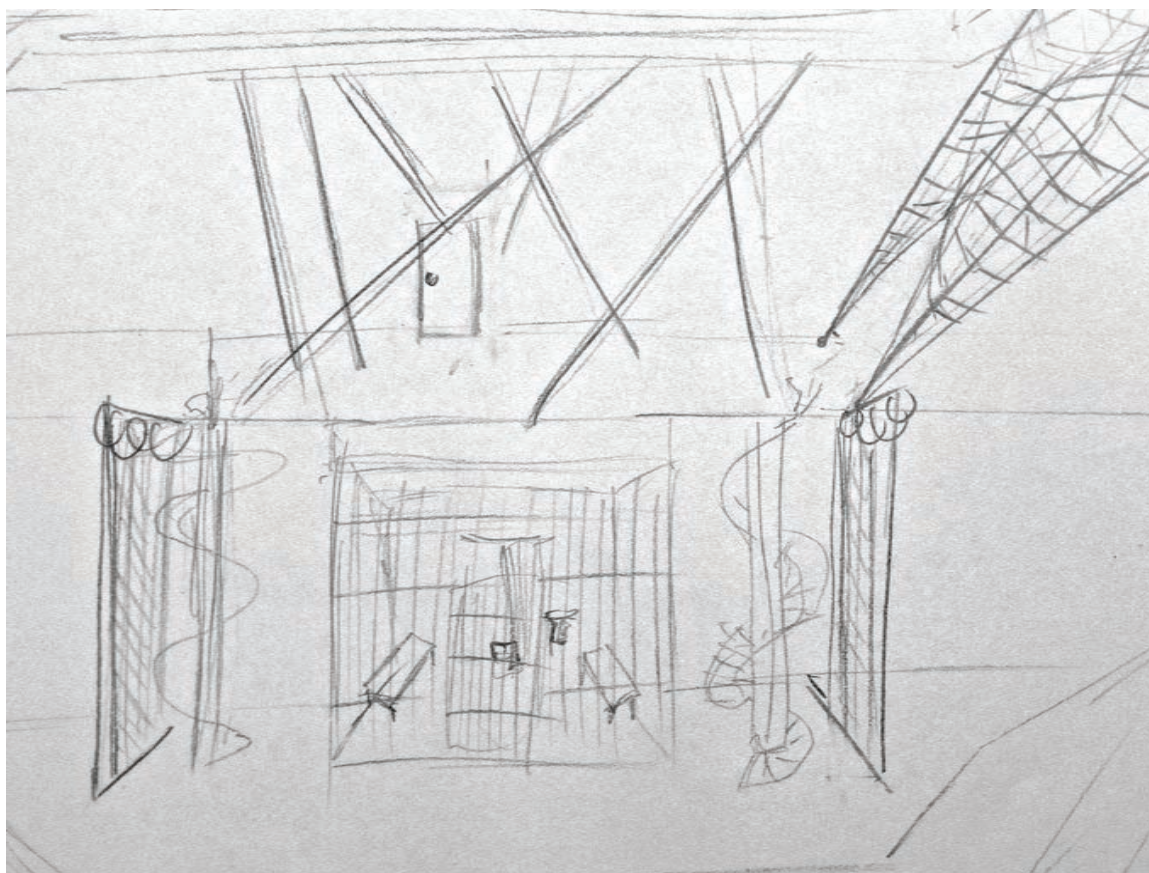


Fig. B1 - Early Set Sketch

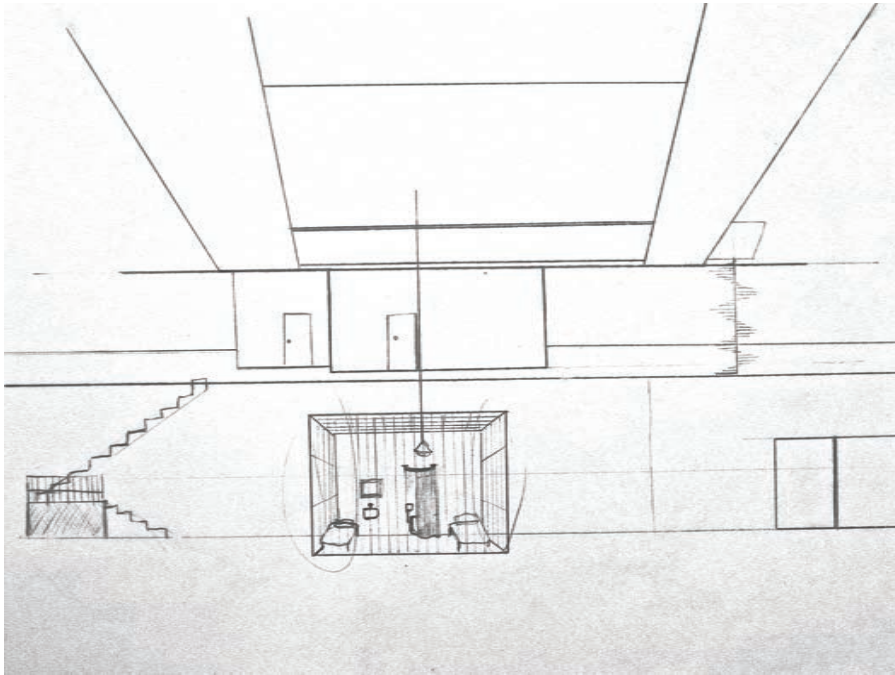


Fig. B2 - Early Set Sketch

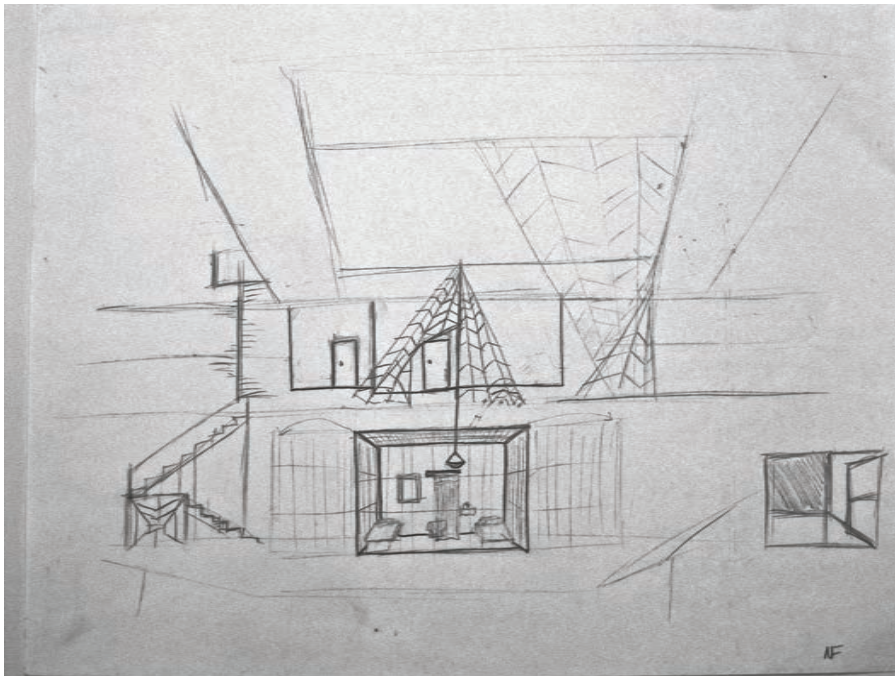


Fig. B3 - Early Set Sketch

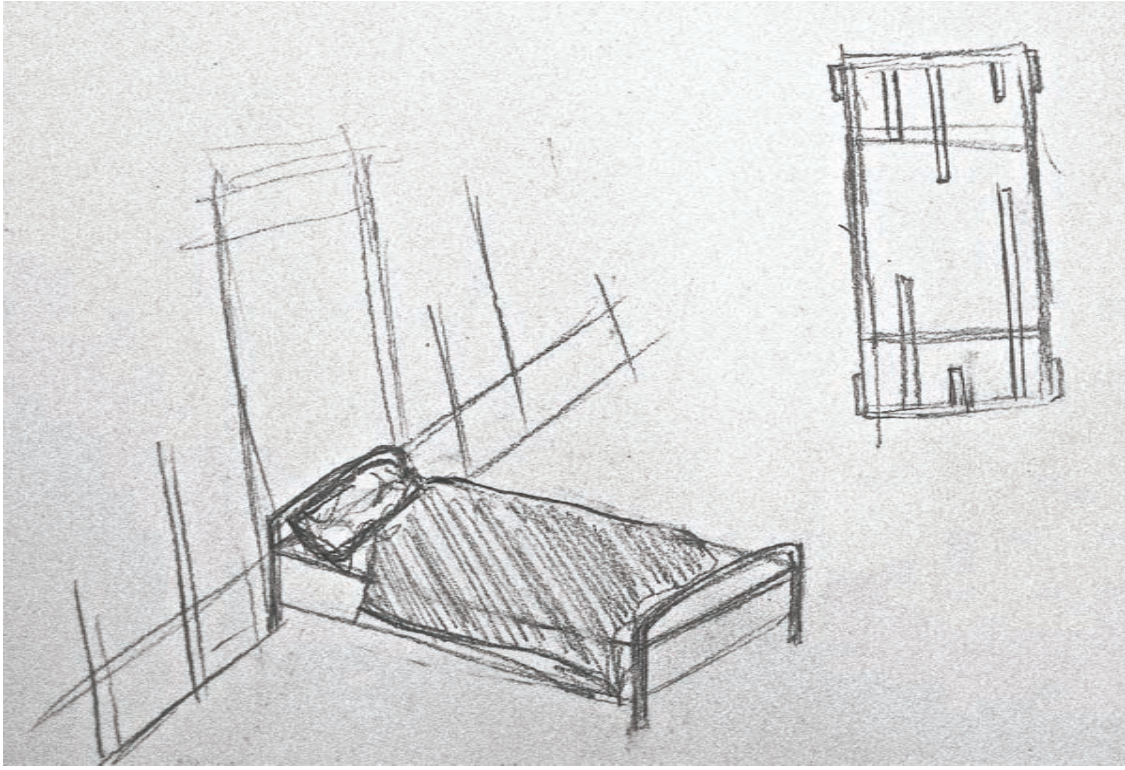


Fig. B4 - Broken Walls/ Bed Sketch

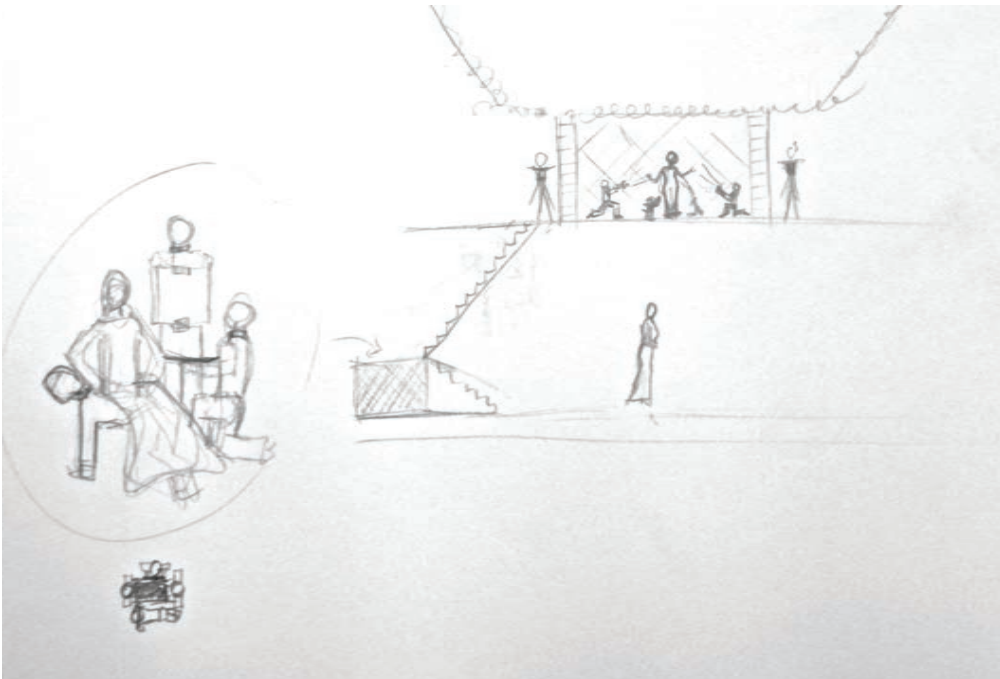


Fig. B5 - Dancers as Furniture Sketch

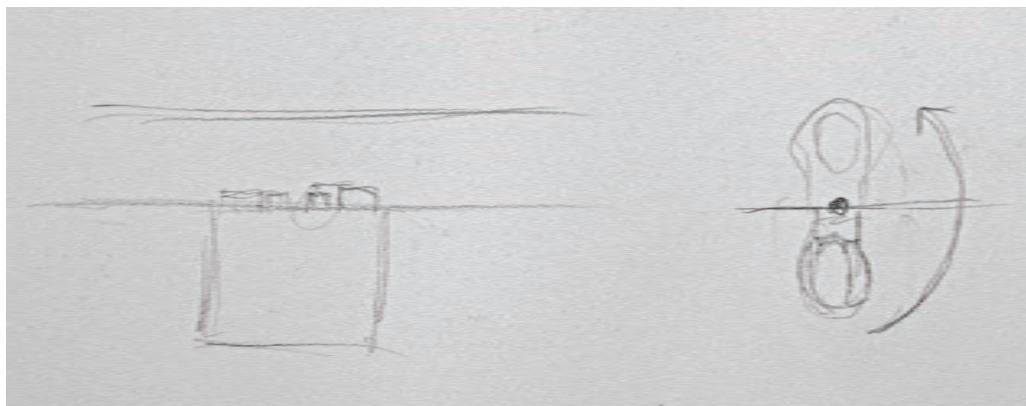


Fig. B6 - Early Toilet/Sink Hiding Sketch

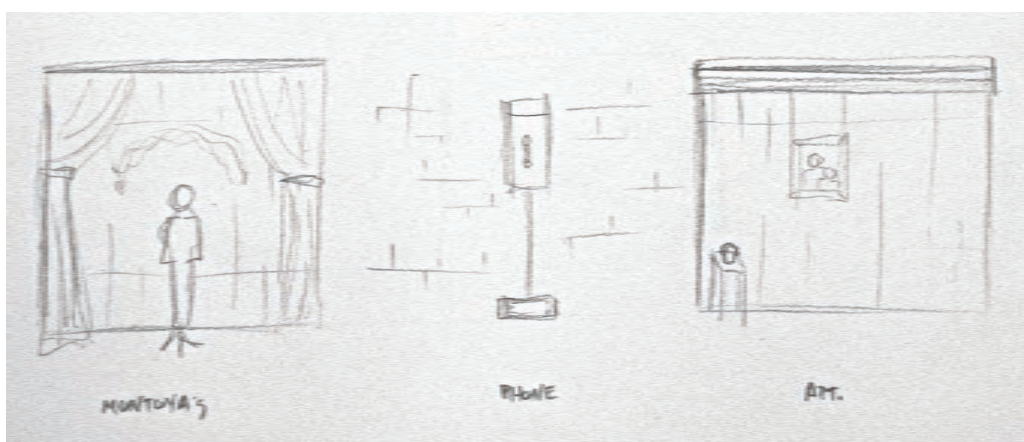


Fig. B7 - Montoya's/Phone Booth/Mom's Apt. Sketch

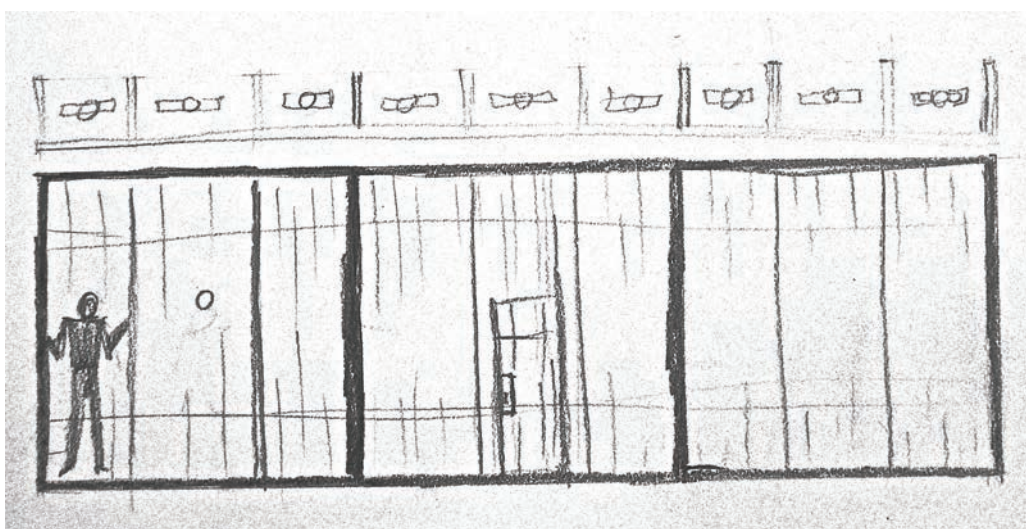


Fig. B8 - Early "Cell Block" Sketch

APPENDIX C

DRAFTING

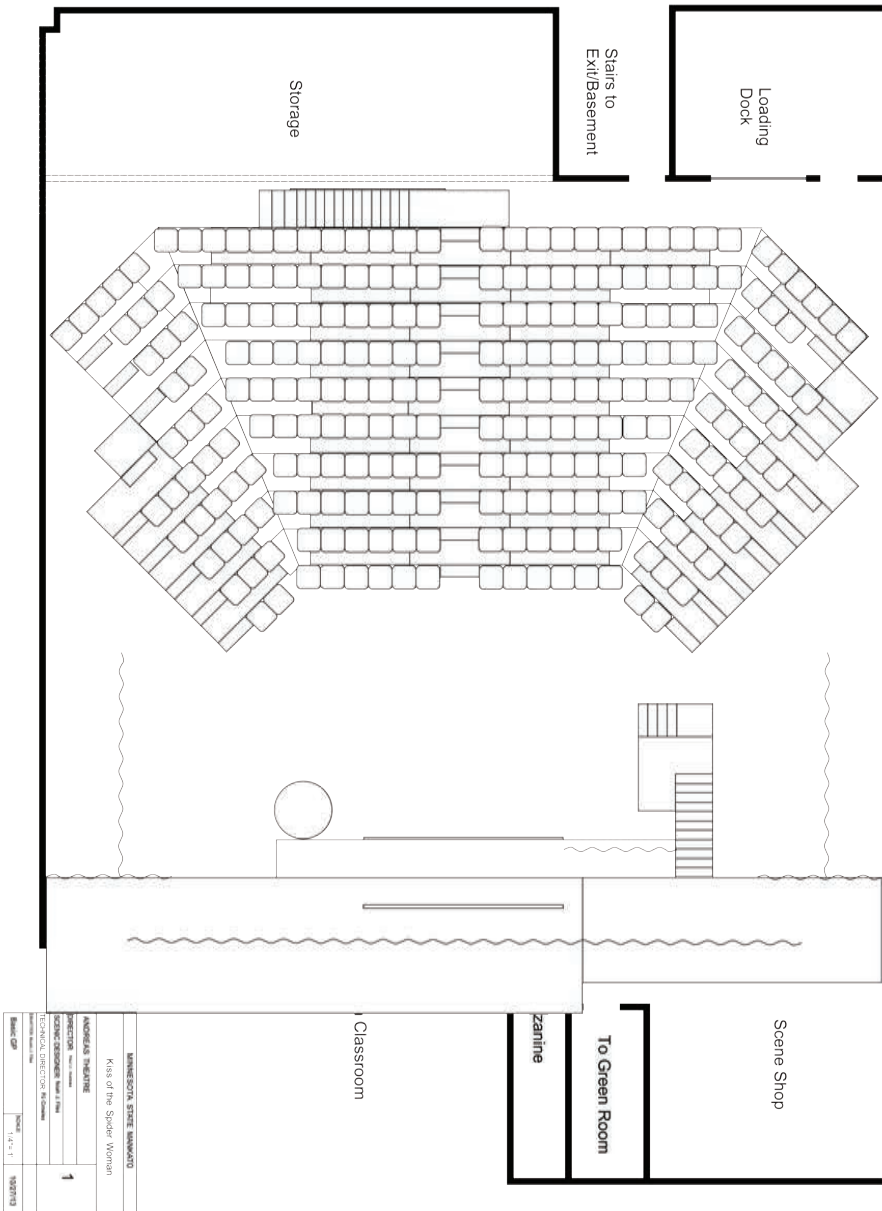
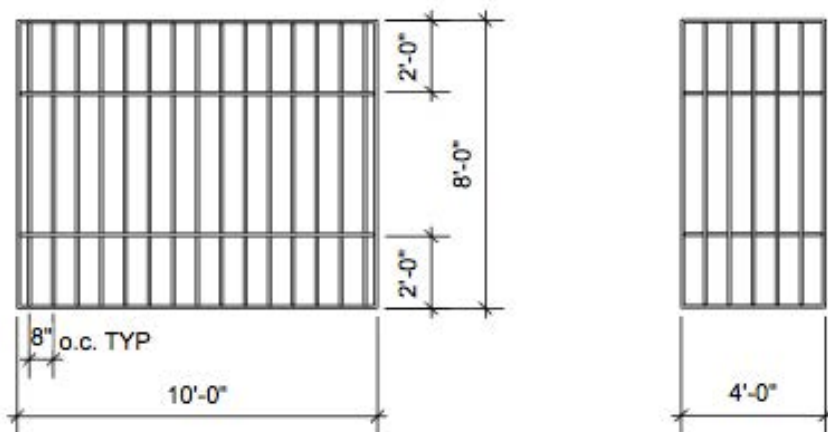


Fig. C1 - Spider Woman Basic Ground Plan (not to scale)



- Notes:
- Build 2 large, 5 small
 - Vertical bars should be inset through horizontal guides
 - Vertical bars measured out from center

MINNESOTA STATE MANKATO		
Kiss of the Spider Woman		
ANDREAS THEATRE	2	
DIRECTOR: Paul J. Hubbs		
SCENIC DESIGNER: Noah J. Fike		
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR: PJ Crowley		
DRAWN: Noah J. Fike		
Barred Walls & Ext. Wall	SCALE: 1/4" = 1'	10/27/13

VECTORWORKS EDUCATIONAL VERSION

Fig. C2 - Prison Bars

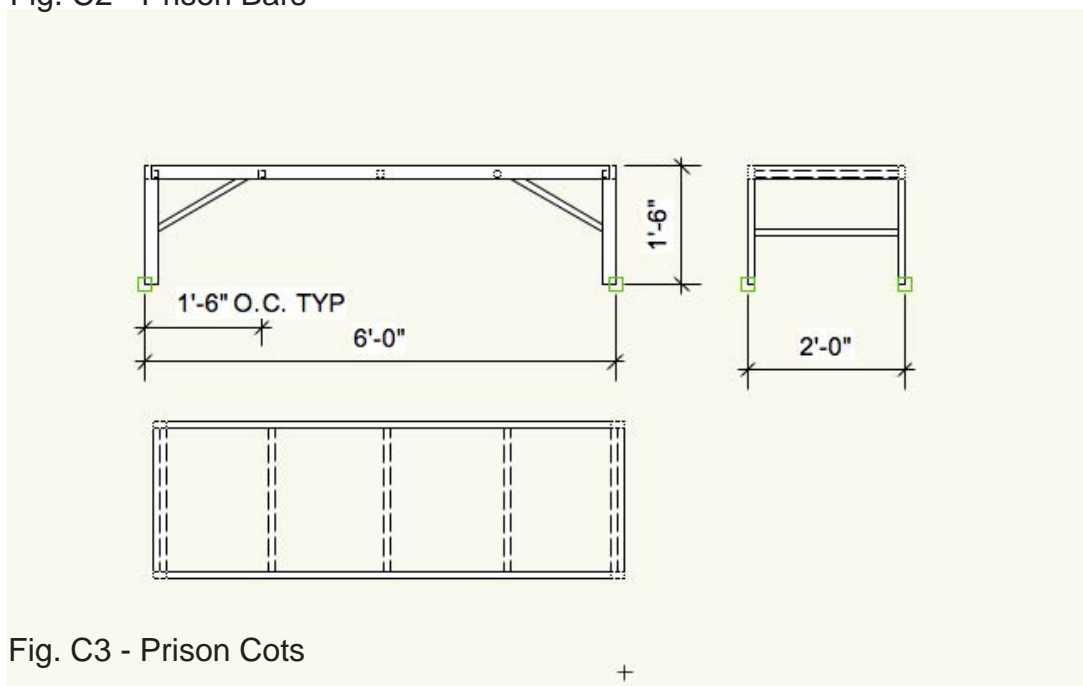


Fig. C3 - Prison Cots

+

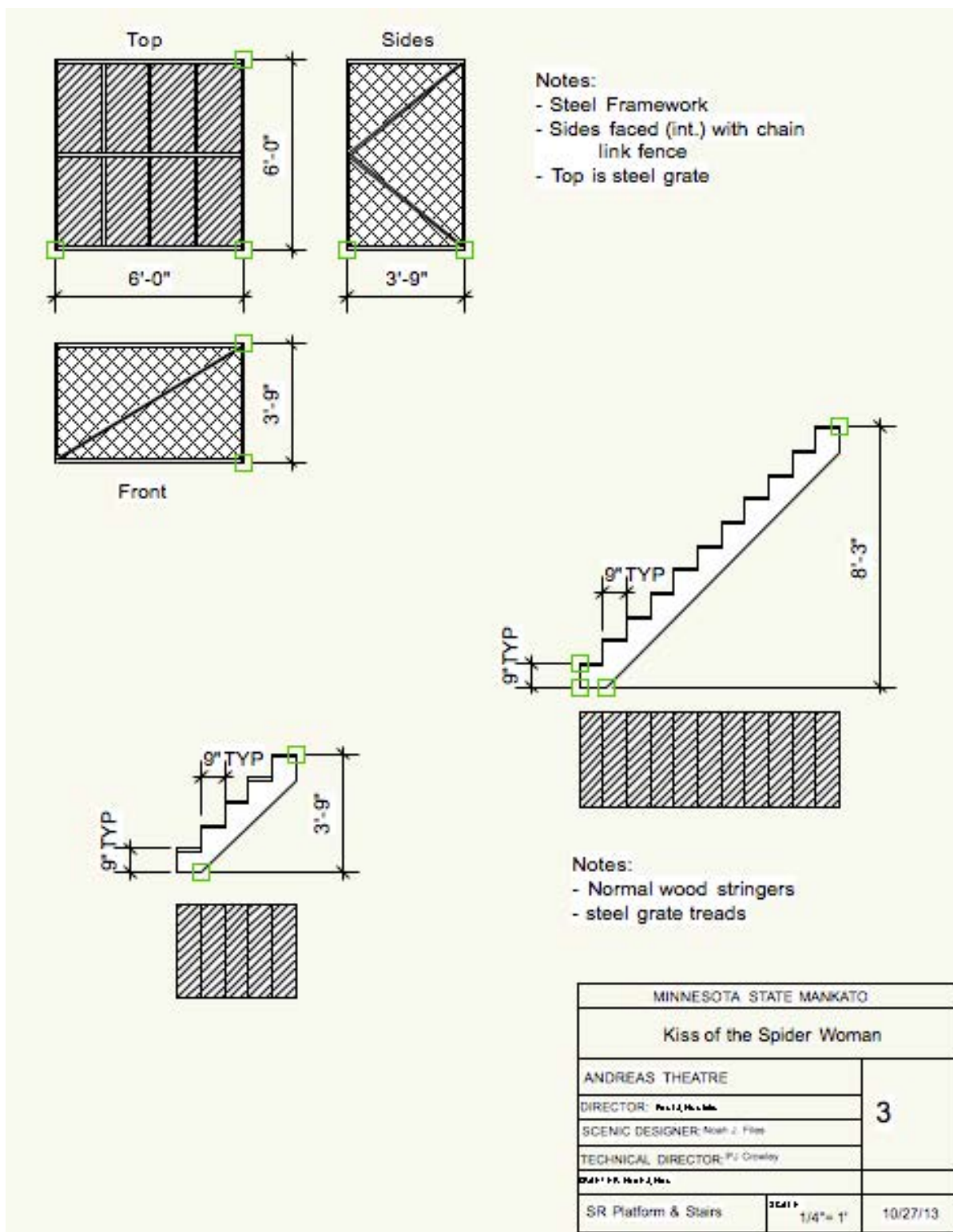


Fig. C4 - Platforms/Stairs

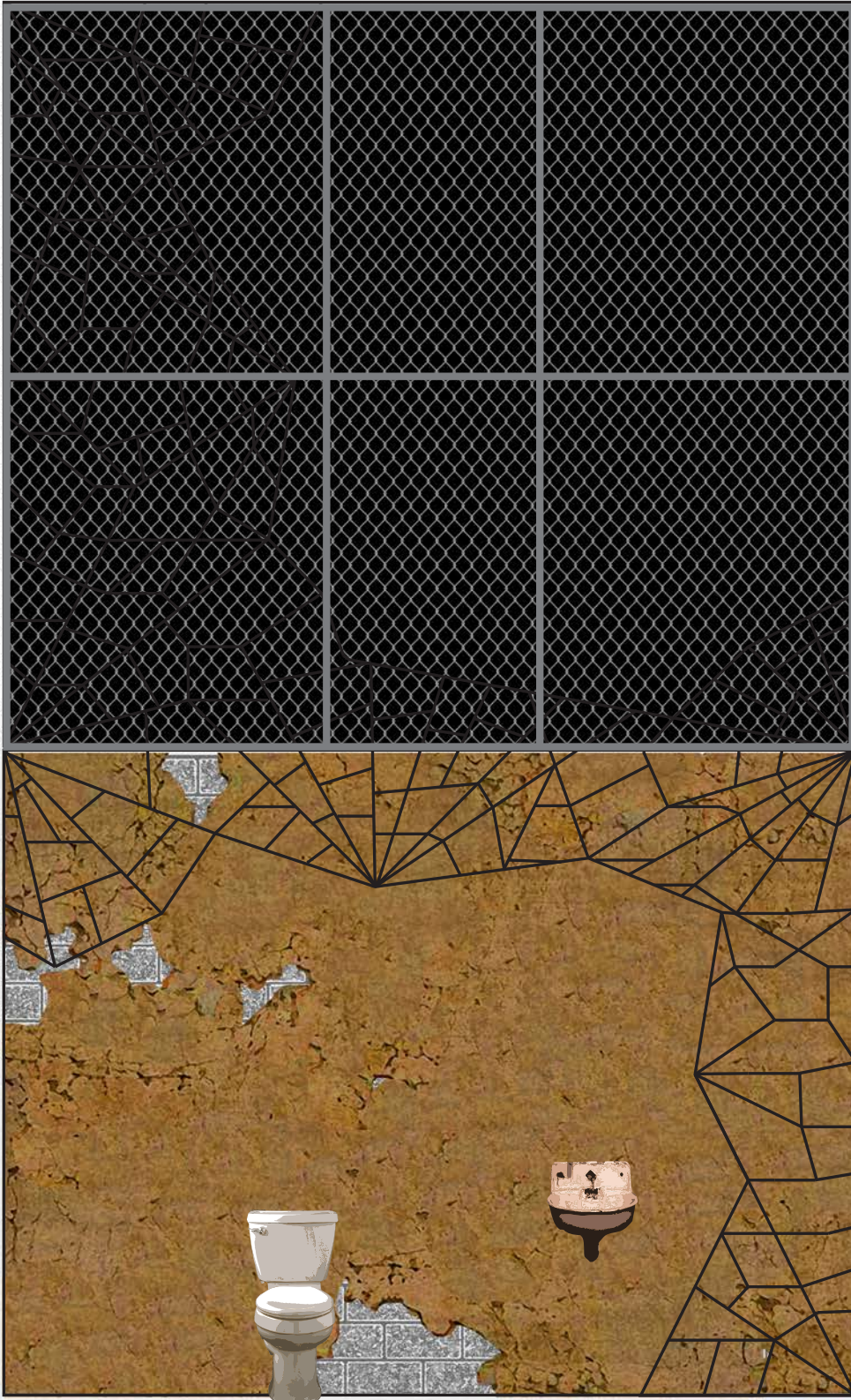


Fig. C5 - Upstage Wall

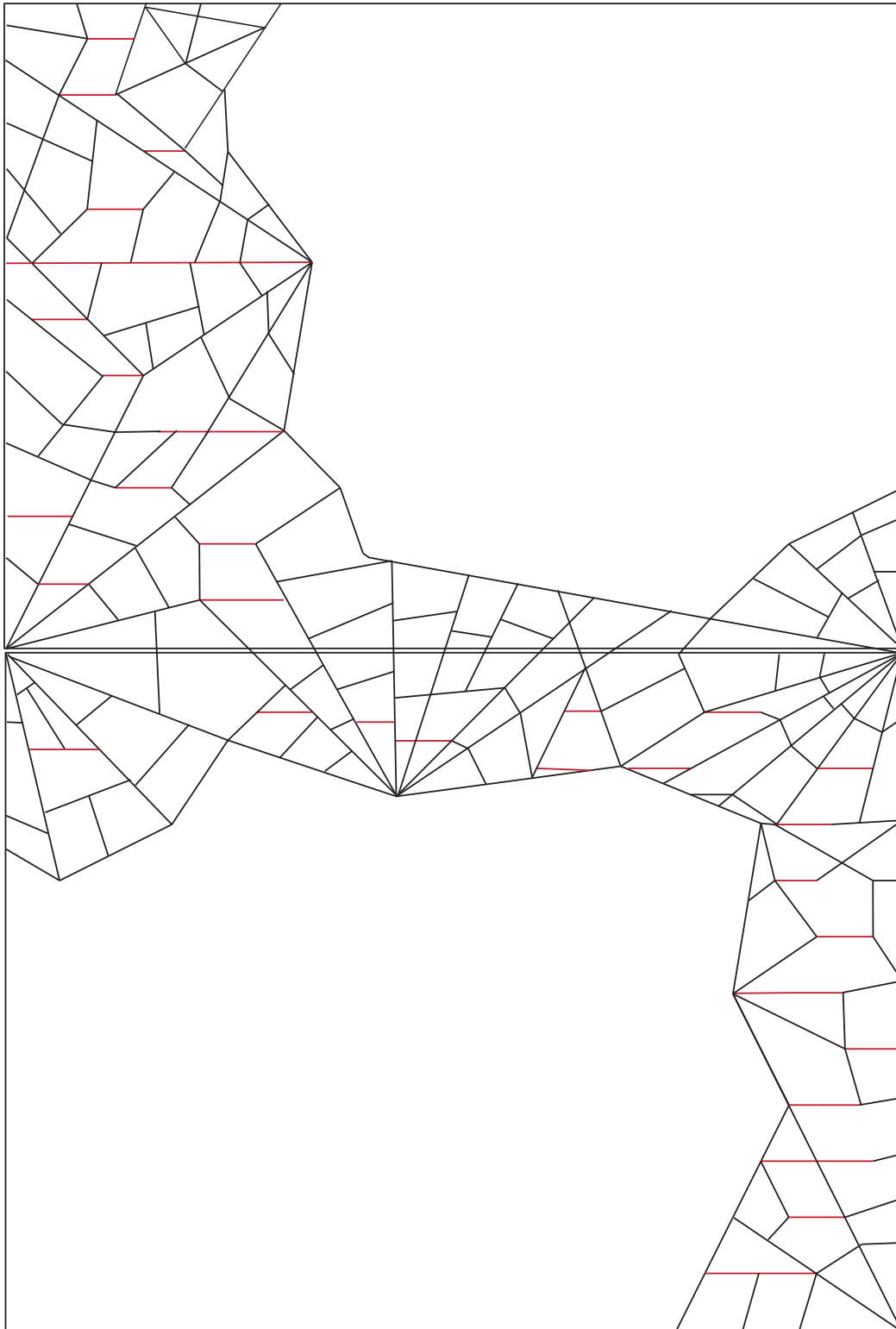


Fig. C6 - Web



Fig. C7 - Molina's Mother's Apt.



Fig. C8 - "Flame of St. Petersburg" Poster

APPENDIX D

MODEL & PRODUCTION PHOTOS

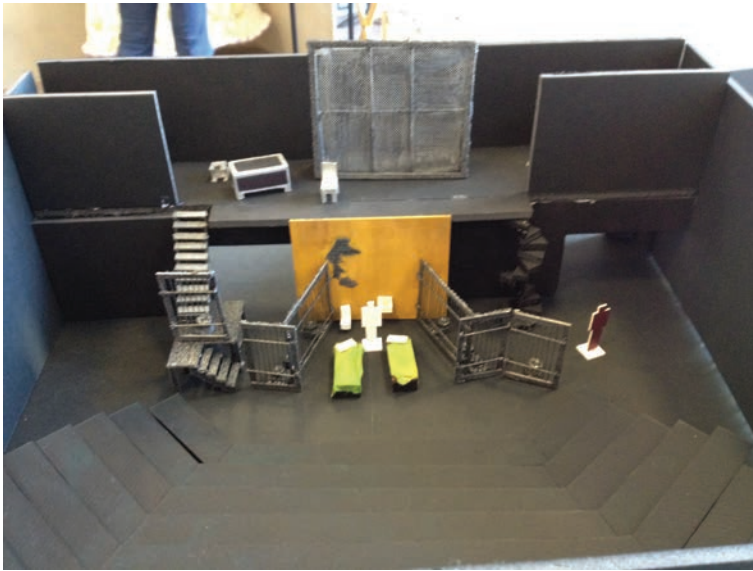


Fig. D1 - Finished Model



Fig. D2 - Finished Model



Fig. D3 - Cage of Humanity



Fig. D4 - "Flame of St. Petersburg"



Fig. D5 - Cell Block



Fig. D6 - Bathtub



Fig. D7 - Montoya's



Fig. D8 - The Spider Woman



Fig. D9 - The Kiss of Death



Fig. D10 - Molina and Valentin's Cell



Fig. D11 - "Gimme Love"



Fig. D12 - Finale, "His Name Was Molina"

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